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A Queen of Atlantis

A Romance of the Caribbean Sea

FRANK AUBREY



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A QUEEN OF ATLANTIS

To

LADY MEUX,

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR, WITH SINCERE
REGARDS, AND AS A SMALL TOKEN OF APPRECIATION
OF MUCH KINDLY ENCOURAGEMENT
RECEIVED AT HER HANDS
IN THE COURSE OF HIS WORK.

November, 1898.

A Queen of Atlantis

A Romance of the Caribbean Sea

BY

FRANK AUBREY

Author of

"The Devil-tree of El Dorado," "A Studio Mystery,"

"Strange Stories of the Hospitals," etc.

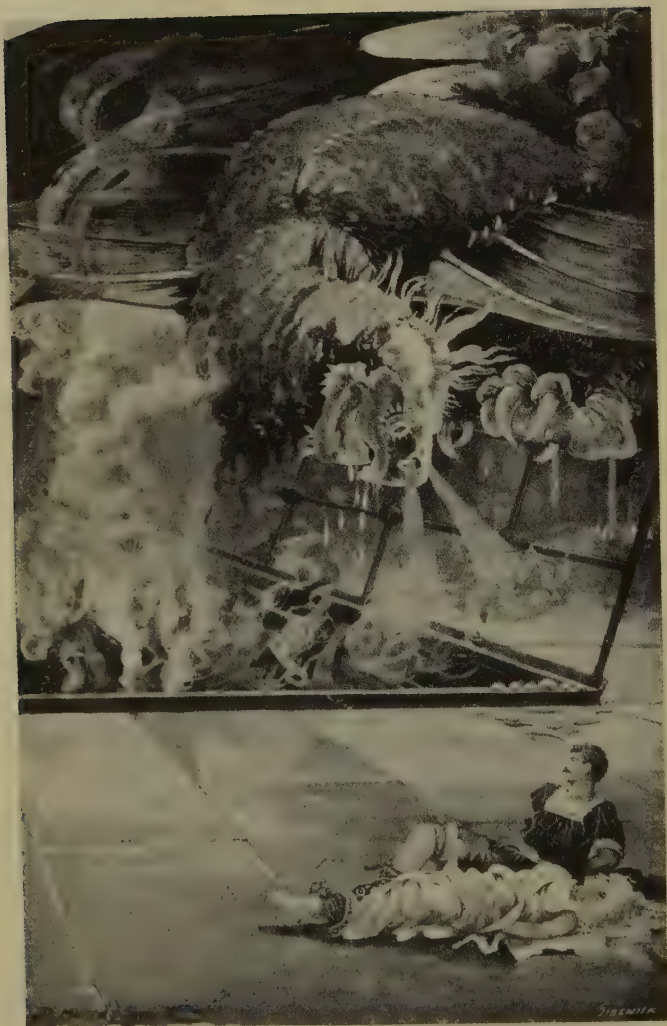
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That frightful shape, with its maddening leer and its blood-curdling scream.
Frontispiece. [p. 374.]

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A QUEEN OF ATLANTIS.

CHAPTER I.

DREAMS AND FANCIES.

"DEAR little boat! Gallant, saucy, little ship! Splendid, dashing, *Saucy Fan*! Isn't this glorious?"

The words were spoken in tones of high enthusiasm by a girl of nineteen or twenty years of age, who stood on the high stern of the brig, *Saucy Fan*, which was reeling and tossing on the Atlantic rollers nearly half-way out on her voyage from Liverpool to Rio de Janeiro.

"This boat, to-day," the speaker went on, with a hand on the rail, and swaying easily with the tumbling vessel, "puts me, somehow, in mind of a little thoroughbred mare I used to have in our home in the Argentine. I called her 'Romping Chit.' She was such a lovely creature! Without whip or spur she would carry you till she dropped, and she seemed to glory in it all the while. And the *Saucy Fan* is just the same. She keeps on her way unceasingly, untiringly; struggling up and down the swirling waves just as 'Romping Chit' would canter all day long over the green, rolling pampas. She never showed a sign of fatigue, and was just as full of

fun, just as ready to break into a romping gallop at the end, as at the beginning, of the day's work. Don't you enjoy a day like this, Mr. Wydale ? ”

Owen Wydale, the person thus addressed, was a well-built, fine-looking young fellow of some twenty-five years. He had a handsome, bronzed face, with dark hair, eyebrows, and moustache ; and very clear, steady, grey eyes. His sturdy, well-set figure betokened somewhat of a military training ; while the manner in which he managed to keep his balance, with hands quietly clasped behind him, showed that he was not unaccustomed to the sea.

“ Just my feeling, Miss Dareville,” he replied. “ This sort of thing has always had a great fascination for me.”

Since, however, he looked, while speaking, at his companion, it was not quite clear which “ sort of thing ” he referred to ;—the blue sky, the rocking vessel, and the white-crested waves, on the one hand, or the dainty, captivating face and form beside him, on the other.

Nor could it be much wondered at if he thought just then most of the latter, for Vanina Dareville was one of those who seem to have been born to tantalise and drive to distraction the soul of any male mortal upon whom they turn their glance.

She had a rather tall, but exquisitely-moulded figure, such as a sculptor would have chosen as a model for Diana ; and a face and head that had a charm, a witchery that were unique. It was not merely, however, that she was beautiful ; it was not only that she possessed lustrous brown eyes, and delicately chiselled features ; all these gifts, charming

and attractive as they are, were immeasurably enhanced by a most unusual, captivating expression; rather, it should be said, expressions. These came and went upon her face, each in turn seeming more seductive, more irresistible than the other. In the pouting lips, round which, as they curled one from the other, dainty little dimples played about, there was a coquettish roguishness that was inexpressibly bewitching. Yet, with all these was sometimes mingled a suggestion of queenly pride and dignity that conveyed a warning; it would not be well, it seemed to intimate, to incur the look of contempt and scorn with which those same lips could curl, and those large eyes could flash, on those who should be rash enough to merit it. To-day, the eyes were flashing only with innocent mirth; and, with her glowing colour, and the little white teeth that the lips at times disclosed, and that wondrous, inimitable smile that was all her own, made up a startling picture. And it was a picture that held Owen Wydale captive, bound in chains more hard to break than ever were fetters of hardened steel.

She was standing upon a piece of board that raised her just high enough from the deck to keep her feet out of the water which washed it every now and then, and with one hand on the rail she swayed freely to and fro with the motion of the brig; every turn, every pose, replete with rare and exquisite grace.

And her companion, noting all her winsomeness, found it no easy matter to turn his glance away from her to look upon the scene around them which had called forth her expressions of delight; while, she on her side, remained all unconscious of the

admiration she inspired, her thoughts and interest being entirely given up to the enjoyment of the moment.

“Look, Mr. Wydale! Look at the water and see how daintily the *Saucy Fan* dips into one wave and then glides up gracefully over another. Oh! if every day at sea were such as this, I should never wish to go ashore again!”

For some minutes the two stood silently watching the great white-crested billows as they darted past, hissing, and seething, and dashing, and surging against the vessel's sides, and finally following one another into the line of foam that marked her wake. The strong, warm, invigorating breeze that whistled through the rigging, and whirled the particles of spray into the face, seemed to bear with it a feeling of exhilaration and elation. At intervals, as though in very sport and mischief, and bent upon justifying her name, the *Saucy Fan* would bury her head in the snowy crest of some soaring, foam-crowned billow, sending up a shower of spray that reflected all the colours of the rainbow, and sparkled in the sunlight before it fell with a crash upon the fore-deck. Then, poising for a moment on the summit of the wave, she would give a coquettish shake, a sort of tremor, before taking the great plunge into the hollow below, mounting the side of the succeeding one with one of those swinging leaps that all true lovers of the sea know so well, and so delight in. Indeed, the pretty brig, to-day, seemed bent upon a game of romps with the great Atlantic rollers that came sweeping up to her; almost, one might think, in imitation of a school of porpoises that were indulging in fantastic antics

not far away. Some distance astern a solitary ship could be discerned, that rose and fell, and bobbed and nodded as though making friendly signs and salutes to its sister-bark in front. Otherwise, there was nothing to be seen on any side but the blue sky and glaring sun above, and the palpitating, heaving bosom of the marine expanse below.

On deck there were only the man at the wheel amidships, the burly skipper who walked to and fro beside him, and a man in oilskins, who lounged in the bow. While the vessel lurched and pitched and the sails strained at their fastenings, the cordage creaked and grated in a wild kind of harmony with the wind that whistled shrilly through the rigging, and, every now and then came the dull, hollow "boom-ff" when a wave struck the bow, followed by the sound of the salt shower that fell pattering upon the deck.

Suddenly Vanina cried, "Look out!" and, with a merry laugh, dexterously ducked under a small canvas awning, just in time to escape a mass of water from a larger wave than usual. It had leaped up suddenly and unexpectedly, just where they were standing, and came rattling on the deck with the patter of a hail-storm. The squall carried away Wydale's hat, which disappeared over the bulwarks.

A moment afterwards a young boy, clad in water-proofs, emerged from the head of the companion that led down into the main cabin, and came towards them. He was a bright-eyed, curly-headed, good-looking youngster of about thirteen or fourteen years of age, and he looked at the two with a bright smile as he approached. Vanina extended a hand to

him, and pushed him well under the shelter of the scanty awning.

"You had better keep close there, Georgy," she remarked; "we have just had a sea break over us."

"I know, sister," the boy replied. "We heard it down in the cabin, and Sydney sent me up to say he thinks the wind is freshening, and that you should come down."

"I, too, fancy it is getting rougher," put in Wydale. "Don't you think we should all do well to seek some better shelter, Miss Dareville?"

"Not I," the lady answered, with vivacity. "I love it! I think I was born with a love for the sea. But, as for you," she went on to Wydale, with another merry laugh, "you'll never make a sailor if you don't learn to keep a better look-out. You were fairly caught that time, and, if I hadn't called out, you would have been thrown upon the deck and been wet through. You should keep a sharper eye to windward. You had better go and find another hat."

"I've got one," Wydale answered, pulling a waterproof cap out of his pocket, and composedly putting it on his head. "The fact is," he went on, "I was too much engaged—after what you said just now about your little mare—in thinking of you—of how you would look—"

"Well—what?" she asked archly, when he hesitated.

"On horseback—dressed as—as—as an Indian huntress, or—as—a warrior queen," he went on, laughing.

"Do you mean in a circus?" she demanded, a little stiffly.

"Oh, no, no! In real life—such as it used to be ages and ages ago," he returned hastily. "In the days when warrior princesses used to carry sword and shield, and ride in their chariots or on their war-horses, into the thick of the battle—and—and—cheer on their soldiers—and—all that sort of thing, you know," he finished up—a little weakly, as he felt.

She looked earnestly at him, and drew a long, deep breath.

"Ah!" she said presently, "it is singular you should have such thoughts. That's how I feel myself sometimes. What put that into your head?"

"I scarcely know; something in your manner at times. You have the face—aye—and the figure, too, for it."

"I hope, all the same, that I don't look like an Amazon," she said. "For me, that kind of character has no attraction."

"No; Diana—or rather, perhaps, say, Boadicea."

"Leading a horde of savage 'Ancient Britons' clad in rough skins! No, thank you! I don't think that would suit me either."

"*Jeanne d'Arc*, then! Surely you will not object to *that* suggestion?"

"Yes, yes! The very thing!" young George put in, with strong approval.

"I'm not good enough," she answered simply. "I fear I should never make a *Jeanne d'Arc*."

"You don't know what you can do till you try," George suggested hopefully, and it was asserted in a tone of such conviction that the others laughed.

"We are talking no end of nonsense," Vanina pre-

sently declared ; " I wonder what put such ideas into your head ? "

" I'm sure I can't quite explain," responded Owen ; " but it must, I think, as I said just now, be something in your face, or manner, or general air. Now I come to think about it, it is rather an odd notion ; yet such ideas seem always to suggest themselves when I look at you."

Vanina gazed dreamily out upon the waters, and seemed to be musing. And, for a space, there was unbroken silence.

" It is curious," she said slowly, after a pause, " but I too, have very strange thoughts at times ; and dreams—especially dreams."

" What dreams ? " asked Owen.

" Dreams," she went on, still slowly, as though recalling them one by one, " of martial hosts, of armoured knights, and men in mail ; of clashing swords, and flashing spears. And often I seem, just as you have suggested, to be myself clad in mail, brandishing a sword or spear, and urging my followers on to battle. And it is all as in the times of long, long ago, ages ago, when there were no cannons, no pistols, no fire-arms of any sort or kind. I often fancy I must have had ancestors chieftains who lived and fought in those ancient times, and that they visit me in my dreams, and in them re-enact the scenes in which they bore a part. What strange days those must have been ! "

" Perhaps better to think of, and read, and talk about, than to experience in their grim reality," Owen observed.

" I don't know ; at least the men of those days were brave ; or those who were not were soon found

out. Men met one another face to face, foot to foot. They did not hide behind shelters, and shoot at one another from places a mile or two apart. How strange it would be for us, if we were unexpectedly thrown back into those old times? How should we act? If we were suddenly to find ourselves back in the midst of such a world, what sort of figure should we cut, I wonder? A poor one, I am afraid, men and women too. Our women of to-day would lack the pluck and endurance of those old-time heroines, and, as for the men—how would they fare if their lives depended upon their skill with sword, and shield, and lance?"

Just then another young fellow came up the companion and called out:

"I want to have a word with you, Wydale. Do you mind coming down for a few minutes?" Then he turned and disappeared; and Wydale, with a brief word of apology to the young lady, followed him.

There came now a sort of lull, and the brother and sister remained for a while silently watching the waves that were racing past. Vanina's thoughts returned to their former channel.

"I was telling Mr. Wydale, Georgy," she said to her young brother, "how much I enjoy being at sea on a day such as this, and on board a boat like the *Saucy Fan*. How splendidly she goes through it! Almost like a well-found, well-behaved yacht!"

"Ah!" returned the boy in a low tone, and with a serious face, "that is all very well, sister, when you are a passenger; but you cannot picture to yourself how very different this same vessel appears to you if you are a poor beggar of a cabin boy, as I was once

here, you know. You can scarcely believe what a place they made it for me ! ”

Vanina took his hand, and pressed it tenderly.

“ I know, poor boy,” was her reply. “ They must have ill-used you indeed, to drive you to—”

“ It was just such a day as this,” he went on dreamily, “ when I crawled out beyond the bowsprit yonder, the seas breaking over me every minute, to escape from the mate ; and when Mr. Wydale came out after me and brought me back. It was a plucky thing for him to do, I can tell you. No one else on the whole ship would have risked it ; and that ugly-faced skipper over there, and his mate—who are so meek and mild to you to-day—stood looking on, and would have let the two of us drown for all they cared.”

Vanina shuddered.

“ I know, Georgy, dear,” she said fervently. “ But let us not talk about it now. It makes me turn quite sick. Certainly I feel we can never, any of us, be sufficiently grateful to Mr. Wydale for what he did for you that day. He must be very brave, and very kind-hearted too.”

“ Brave ? He’s more than that ! He’s—he’s—” and the boy hesitated, and cast about for a simile ; then wound up with, “ he’s a regular brick ! ”

Meanwhile, the subject of this little talk was seated in the cabin of the brig, in close conference with the elder brother of the two, one Sydney Dareville. He was a well-built, good-looking man of nearly thirty ; had been at one time a sailor, and at another had seen service as an officer in one or other of the endless civil wars that are ever breaking out in the volcanic regions

of South America. A little thinner than Wydale, and a little taller, he also exhibited somewhat more of the swagger and dash that characterise the ex-soldier adventurer. Ordinarily, one could read in his laughing eyes something of the merry, boyish good-humour of his young brother, mingled with the roguish high spirits that characterised his sister. To-day, however, he was grave, and evidently disturbed in mind.

"Fancies or no fancies," he was saying, "I cannot put aside these feelings of vague suspicion and distrust that have laid hold of me. In my father's time all our vessels were manned by honest, decent men. How has it come about that my precious step-father and his present partner should send old and tried servants packing, to put in their places rascals like Durford, our cheerful skipper here, and Foster, his scoundrel of a mate, and the rest of our hang-dog looking crew? Can you explain that to me?"

"That they are a bad lot—at least, with the possible exception of Peter Jennings, the ship's carpenter—I have good reason to know," Wydale agreed. "Still—"

"And what is that vessel behind us?" the other interrupted. "And why does she follow us as she has, taking in sail again and again, as I have seen with my own eyes, to keep in our wake when she had been overhauling us?"

"That may be but a fancy on your part; they may have feared foul weather. It has been squally and unsettled for some days. Of course, I can see what you are hinting at, but really cannot understand what anyone would have to gain by such a crime. The

cargo is ours, or ours and your friend Casella's jointly. The brig itself is partly yours—"

"Aye, this brig carries all I have left in the world to call my own," Dareville interrupted gloomily.

"—And the insurance is made out in your joint names. Where, then, would be the gain to those you have in your mind?"

Sydney Dareville regarded his companion for a moment fixedly, then with a dry smile replied:

"What have they to gain? Nothing much on the ship and cargo, truly; but—if my sister and young brother were to die before coming of age—my respected step-father would come into—fifty thousand pounds."

Wydale started, and looked incredulously at the speaker.

"I never heard of that," he murmured; "you never told me. I had no idea that your sister was—that is, that your brother and sister were—" He hesitated.

"You didn't know that Vanina was an heiress," Dareville answered, with a hollow laugh. "Yes, very much so, my friend. And now you can understand why it would suit certain persons very well indeed if the three of us went to Davy Jones's Locker, as the outcome of this voyage. And you know now why I am distrustful and uneasy, and want you to be watchful and to help me to keep a sharp eye upon all that goes on. Now I must go up and fetch those two young people down. I can hear that the wind is getting up again." With that he rose and went on deck.

And Owen Wydale, turning over in his mind all

that had been said, could not help recalling the talk he had had on deck concerning Vanina Dareville's "dreams."

"Well, *they*, at least, were but dream-fancies," he at last said to himself. "Heaven send that these misgivings of Dareville's may turn out to be fancies, too."

CHAPTER II.

LEFT TO DIE IN THE SARGASSO SEA.

OWEN WYDALE'S presence on board the *Saucy Fan* this voyage had been brought about in a somewhat curious way. On her last voyage, which had been from the Cape to Liverpool, he had shipped at Cape Town as the only passenger, and had had very unpleasant experience of the character of her skipper and crew. He was returning to England after an absence of some years, during which he had knocked about the world a good deal, and had seen life under many varying phases. He had served for a year in the Cape Mounted Rifles, and seen some fighting; he had shot lions and other "big game" in the depths of the African forest and out on the "veldt," and had, in one place and another, met with many strange adventures and hair-breadth escapes. His mother he had never known; his father had died a few years before, leaving to him—his only child—just enough to get along with and no more, and he had lost some of his capital by injudicious speculations in African mines. Hence, at the time referred to, when he was returning to England with a vague idea of "settling down" to some sort of occupation, motives of economy had induced him to take passage in a small sailing vessel instead of in a steamer.

He had been not long at sea, however, before he

found cause to regret having chosen the *Saucy Fan*; not on account of any fault to be found with the vessel herself, but by reason of the behaviour of the majority of those on board. The skipper, Joseph Durford, and his chief mate, Steve Foster, showed themselves to be blustering bullies, cruel and unscrupulous towards those whom they thought it safe to subject to ill-usage. In particular, they seemed to find a special delight in ill-treating two young boys who had the misfortune to form part of the ship's company. One—the younger of the two—was deaf and dumb; but even that affliction did not avail to save him from the brutalities of his tormentors. Wydale soon saw that the vessel was manned by a ruffianly crew, and that, while the skipper and his mate bullied everybody all round, the two lads included, many of the men joined in against the latter to wreak on them, in turn, the revengeful feelings they durst not show towards those above them. The elder of the two boys strenuously tried his utmost to help and shield the younger. Many a blow did he receive that had been aimed at the other; but this chivalrous conduct, so far from exciting sympathy, as one would have expected, would only bring upon him further blows and thrashing. This was especially noticeable in the case of the mate, Steve Foster, who seemed to pass no inconsiderable portion of his time in devising petty cruelties and malicious torments against the two helpless lads.

Wydale viewed these proceedings with indignation and disgust, and had more than one stormy passage with both skipper and mate in consequence. He soon discovered that the two boys had been

delicately nurtured ; they had, indeed, run away from home, and hidden themselves as stowaways in the brig, just before she had left Rio de Janeiro for the Cape. They, or rather George, the elder—for the other could not speak—obstinately refused to give any account of themselves ; and this was one thing—so he said—that excited the ire of the skipper. He grudged, moreover, every mouthful the youngsters ate—he worked on a profit-sharing arrangement with the owners, it appeared, and would lose considerably by their being on board. These, at least were the statements he repeated, again and again, to Wydale ; but the latter subsequently found reason to regard them with some doubt. At last, one morning, the little deaf and dumb boy was missing. He had jumped overboard in the night, leaving a pitiful note behind him addressed to his brother saying that he could bear his life no longer, that he was going to join their “dear dead mother,” and concluding with a touching expression of hope that his brother would get on better without him. “Perhaps they will be kinder to you without me, dear brother,” the poor, ill-used little fellow wrote, “because I am so stupid, and I cannot hear what they say, and do things quick enough.” And so he had slipped over the vessel’s side in the darkness, and gone for ever from the view alike of those who loved him and those who had made his short young life a burden too great for him to bear.

Over this pathetic tragedy a stormy scene took place between Wydale and the skipper and his mate that almost ended in blows. Wydale’s indignation led him roundly to accuse the two of deliberate murder

or what amounted thereto; and he declared his intention of laying information against them for that crime, or manslaughter, so soon as he got ashore. The skipper retorted by threatening to put him in irons, if he did not mind his own business, and refrain from interference between him and those under his control.

One would have thought that the miserable end to which the little stowaway had been driven would have earned for the survivor surcease of ill-usage—and it did for a few days, but for no longer. Then the old persecutions, the tormentings, the ropes-endings began again, as bad as, even worse than, ever. One thing was now noticeable, however; Foster, the mate, was almost alone in the matter. The others had, to some extent at least, felt sufficiently impressed by what had occurred to refrain from further brutal violence. But Foster seemed possessed by an almost insane hatred of the lad; it looked, indeed—as Wydale bluntly told the skipper—as if the man were deliberately trying to drive the boy to follow the example of his unhappy brother.

One day the lad, to escape from his enemy, climbed out beyond the bowsprit on to the jib-boom, where he clung in imminent peril of being washed off, loudly declaring he would drop into the sea, unless a promise were given to ill-treat him no more. Wydale, at great personal risk, climbed out after him and brought him back, just when he was on the point of dropping into the sea. He had, in fact, already fainted, and would have fallen, but that one arm had become jammed between the spar and the foretopmast-stay. In this dangerous position—the seas rising

and breaking over him from time to time—the rescuer received aid from one man only, Peter Jennings, the ship's carpenter ; the skipper, his mate, and several of the men standing about looking on and grinning.

After this episode, Wydale took the lad entirely under his protection, paying—though he could ill-afford it ; his passage money as a first-class passenger ; and thenceforth the boy was no more molested.

Leaving Wydale for the moment, and turning to the three Darevilles, it should be stated that they were the daughter and sons of an Englishman, now dead, who had settled in South America many years before, and had been partly a ship-owner, partly a rancher, with considerable estates in Brazil and Argentina. At his death, Mrs. Dareville—to her sorrow, as it afterwards turned out—married Mr. William Blane, a man of whom little was known beyond the fact that he had made some money in Australia, and had joined the ship-owning firm of Dareville, Armitage, & Co., shortly before Mr. Dareville's death. After a year or two of unhappiness with her second husband, Mrs. Blane died, leaving to his care her three children by her first husband, *viz.*, Vanina, and two boys, George and Fred, the latter being deaf and dumb. Sydney Dareville, the eldest son, having no great liking for his step-father, and having inherited from his father a sum of money and a small share in the ship-owning business, had left home some time before, and gone away to seek fortune or adventure, as the case might be. Some of his interest in the firm he sold, retaining only a small share.

Vanina was sent to England to finish her education.

She would be entitled, when of age, to a small fortune, her father having left a sum to each of his children on their attaining their majority, with the proviso that the shares of any dying before that event were to go to the survivors. The reason given by her step-father for sending her to England was that she might be educated so as to fit her for the position she would have to fill. But Sydney Dareville declared curtly, when he heard of the arrangement, that Blane merely wished to get her out of the way.

While away she received very unhappy letters from her two younger brothers, complaining of the unkind treatment they met with at the hands of their step-father and a woman to whom he had confided them, and culminating in the announcement that after the tender affection of their mother, his unkindness was more than they could bear, and that they had resolved to run away.

Thus it came about that these two little unfortunates, by some strange chance—if there is such a thing in this world—hid themselves away in the first vessel that opportunity supplied, and this happened to be one of those partly owned by their dreaded step-father. But of that they had no knowledge. They had lived all their lives on the ranch, and had never seen a ship before; and, if they had heard that their late father had been a ship-owner, it had conveyed but the vaguest notion to their young minds. When afterwards they had to face the skipper, they, or rather George—for the other could only speak by the deaf and dumb alphabet—said that their name was Simmons. Beyond that, they obstinately refused to give any account of themselves or of their friends

or relatives. How they fared—how the poor little waifs fell out of the frying-pan into the fire—has been told above.

Shortly after the two boys ran away, Sydney Dareville, tired of soldiering, came to Rio and called at the offices of the firm there to see his step-father. He had resolved to sell out a further share in the firm, and invest the proceeds in a trading venture in partnership with a friend who had a commercial connection in the Argentine. He was informed by the Rio agent that Mr. Blane had gone to Liverpool, partly upon business, and partly to arrange for his (Dareville's) sister to return home. It being part of Dareville's plan to go, in any case, to England, to select and purchase a ship-load of miscellaneous goods, he followed him by next steamer, instead of going to their home ; thus he failed to hear that his two young brothers had levanted, the agent being unaware of it.

Thus also it came about that, when Owen Wydale, with his young protégé—concerning whom he felt very much perplexed, feeling that he could not well afford to take the boy's whole future upon himself—arrived in Liverpool, the lad's relatives were already in the town. Yet would he probably have missed them had he not gone to the office of the owners' agent, a Mr. Ridgway, to lay his complaint against the skipper and his mate. George had told his new friend his real name, and such other particulars as he knew about himself ; but they were not clear enough to lead Wydale to suppose that the boy's step-father was one of the present owners of the vessel, even if he had known or remembered the

name of the firm, which he did not. His relations with the skipper had not been such as to lead to much talk between them during the latter part of the voyage. When, therefore, Wydale, accompanied by George, entered Mr. Ridgway's office, their astonishment was great at finding there Mr. Blane himself. That gentleman looked anything but pleased to see his step-son, and listened but coldly to Wydale's account of what had happened. In reply to it he merely said he would think the matter over, refunded him the amount he had paid Durford for the lad's passage, and added that he would take future charge of him himself. George's terror at this was so extreme that Wydale hesitated as to what he ought to do; but when, a minute or two later, the boy heard that his brother and sister were in the town, he quickly brightened up, and Wydale then formally handed him over to his step-parent's custody, and returned to his hotel.

There, next day, came George, bringing Sydney and his sister, who thanked him in very different fashion from Mr. Blane's for his kindness to their brother, and quickly all became on friendly terms.

The two young men had many tastes in common; both had had some military training, and seen actual fighting; each had knocked about the world and met with adventures. Small wonder, therefore, that they soon became not only fast friends, but eventually partners in Dareville's projected trading venture. It appeared that all Dareville had left of his former interest in the firm consisted of a half share in the *Saucy Fan*, and this he had been unsuccessfully endeavouring to sell to his step-father. Therefore he

was in a quandary, not having sufficient capital to pay for his share of the cargo. When Wydale was informed of this, he readily offered to join and go out with him, to seek fortune in the *Saucy Fan*, by which vessel Dareville had already arranged to take his cargo and his sister out together. Wydale expressed some reluctance to sail again with the present skipper and crew, but Dareville laughed, declaring that he would either keep them in their places, or know the reason why. In any case, he said, he had not the power to interfere with the manning of the vessel ; so Wydale reluctantly gave up the point.

But a short time before, he could hardly have conceived it possible that he could have been induced to take another voyage in such company ; now he would have made almost any sacrifice to sail in the same ship with Vanina Dareville, whose bright eyes and winning smiles had made a captive of him.

Thus the four young people had embarked together ; and at first all had gone on as well as could be hoped for in the circumstances. The skipper gave up the chief cabin entirely to them, and lived in a deck-house. They had but little occasion to speak either to him or to his mate ; but, when they did, those worthies showed themselves exceedingly deferential towards their passenger-part-owner, and those with him. Yet the good little ship had not been long at sea before Sydney Dareville, as has been seen, began to entertain misgivings. Moreover, just before sailing, at a time when it was altogether too late to alter their arrangements, he had come across an old friend who had expressed grave doubts of Durford and "his

gang," as he called them, hinting at dark doings in their former history. But Dareville at the time had kept this to himself, and only mentioned it to Wydale now, because other incidents—each of little moment in itself, yet in the aggregate importing much—had occurred to make him feel uneasy.

This was his state of mind when he left the cabin to fetch the two on deck. He met them already on their way to join him, for the skipper had warned them that a "dirty" squall was coming up, and the crew were already shortening sail. But, when it came, it proved to be much more than a squall; and it struck the gallant little ship before she was prepared to meet it, threw her, for some minutes, on her beams-ends, and quickly stripped from her some of the canvas she still carried. For two days, a heavy gale was raging, and the brig drove before the wind under almost bare poles, and going whither, no one in the cabin knew. Scarcely one of them, in fact, stirred out of it. Fortunately, their respective sleeping cabins opened into it; as well as several tiny rooms used as store cupboards, in which were kept a few articles handy for use, such as potted meats, bread and biscuits, a cask of water, and so on. Else might the little party have been starved; for no one came near them, save once or twice the skipper, who shouted down some unintelligible words about the hatchway, and forthwith went away. Once or twice, too, Owen or Sydney would venture on deck to take a look round; but, since nothing was to be seen but a wild waste of tumbling waters and driving spray, they returned quickly to the shelter of the cabin.

On the afternoon of the third day the weather began to moderate, and Wydale and Dareville were able to pass a short time on deck. But the outlook was still dark and gloomy, they reported, on their return; and night closed in on a still raging sea. But most curious—so Dareville thought—there astern, could still be seen the vessel that had seemed to dog them. She must have somehow followed them even through the hurricane.

"I am glad to say," observed Dareville to his sister, when they had rejoined her, "that I think we shall all be able to take a good rest to-night. The sea is evidently going down, though slowly; and in the morning you should be able to get out of this stuffy place, and be on deck again."

"That will be a glad change, indeed," returned Vanina. "I had no idea the cabin of a ship could become so hateful to one. A few days more of this would go far to cure me of my fondness for the sea. I would much rather be on deck and face the weather."

Presently there were some knocks on the hatch above, and, on going to see the cause, Owen found the ship's cook bearing a pot filled with steaming coffee.

"Cap'en thought as maybe ye'd like a cup o' coffee apiece," he said shortly. "Couldn't boil nothin' afore; the sea kep' puttin' out the galley fire. You've got cups and saucers."

And with that brief explanation the man handed over the coffee-pot and disappeared.

"H'm! It's little enough civility Durford has shown us," Dareville commented, with a laugh; "so

I suppose we ought to think the more of this unexpected piece of politeness. Anyway, a cup of coffee's welcome."

But its flavour failed to satisfy their expectations. It was only partly drunk, and voted disappointing, and fully half of it was thrown away. Shortly after the four retired to their respective sleeping berths, to take the first spell of unbroken rest they had enjoyed since the storm began.

In the morning Owen woke suddenly, and with a strange sensation of uneasiness. Almost immediately he heard Dareville's voice calling and asking whether he was awake. He had not taken off his clothes, so he stepped out at once, and both went into the main cabin. Everything was strangely quiet. The vessel scarcely moved; she merely rose and fell on a slight swell, as though at anchor in a sheltered harbour. But beyond the soft plash of ripples against her side, and a scarcely perceptible creaking of the cordage, no sound was to be heard. No voices, no footsteps on the deck, nothing whatever to denote the presence of human beings. Wydale and Sydney stared blankly at each other; then, with a common impulse, made a rush up the companion and tried to open the hatch. It resisted all their efforts! Plainly the hatches had been fastened down upon them!

"What devil's-trap is this we have fallen into?" exclaimed Dareville, in mingled fear and anger—fear for his helpless younger brother and sister more than for himself, and wrath at the trick that had been played upon them. Then came a staggering thought. Had the wretches deserted the vessel, having first scuttled her, and left them there to die, stived up in

the cabin like caged animals? Even now, while they were wasting precious moments, the vessel might be slowly filling through holes made by the scoundrels!

"Where's my rifle—and my revolver?" Dareville cried. "If they are within shot when we get on deck, I'll give them something to remember this business by!"

But, when he went to look for his arms, he found they had disappeared; so had Wydale's; and every cartridge with them.

Just then Vanina joined them. She read in their averted eyes that something serious had happened. Owen would have said a word to reassure her, and sent her away, perhaps, but Dareville interposed.

"This is no time for mincing matters," he declared, "and she *must* know directly; for we must break our way somehow out of here, and my sister is no weak-minded simpleton."

So he briefly explained what had occurred.

She fully justified his confidence, for she scarcely so much as winced, and her colour never changed. She drew herself up with one of the proud flashes that at times would dart forth from her eyes, as though rebuking Wydale for his anxiety on her account, and said quietly:

"I see. I understand. If you think you can break open the hatch, do so at once. I will go in and talk to George." And she turned and left them.

Dareville could not repress a gesture of admiration, or of conscious pride, at the behaviour of his sister.

"Told you so," he muttered, with a glance at Wydale. "She's a girl in a thousand for pluck." Then he went on, looking round: "And now, how to

get that beast of a doorway open ! And be on the look-out ! For all it seems so quiet, some cowardly scoundrel may be lurking up there with a pistol to shoot us down the moment we show our heads. I've heard of such things before."

"So've I," said Wydale, between his teeth. "We've been two fools, Dareville, and ought to have known better, especially with a lady and a young lad in our charge. Two of us to look after them, and, with all, to fall into such a clumsy trap as this."

The other made no reply, and they both set to work, though cautiously. It took some time, and they had to break up some of the fitted furniture in the cabin to use as battering-rams before they made much impression. However, no one interfered, and they heard no sound, and, after a time, they were able to raise the hatch a little way, and take a careful look round. Then they pushed it open and emerged on to the deck. Plainly the vessel was deserted ; both the boats had gone. There had been three before the storm, and all had now disappeared.

Sydney called to Vanina, who soon appeared, leading by the hand her brother, looking, as was but natural, very pale and scared.

"Confound their impudence !" exclaimed Dareville, gazing around him in astonishment. "What are they up to in all this ? What in the name of all that's diabolical is their little game ?"

The air was misty, and they could see no great distance whichever way they looked ; but, so far as the view extended, there was nothing but one great field of green ; they were surrounded on every side by a mass of seaweed.

Dareville stepped forward and tried the pumps. In a few minutes he came back, looking very thoughtful and perplexed.

"It's very odd," he said, "but the vessel's all right. Seems to be sound as a bell. At any rate, there's no water to speak of in the hold. They haven't even tried to scuttle her—so far as I can make out."

"Then what in the name of all that's damnable," asked Owen, "is the meaning of this trickery?"

But Sydney Dareville had had a twelvemonth on board ships some years before, and knew more about the sea of that part of the world than Wydale did, and already an idea was forming in his mind that nearly froze his heart with horror.

Turning to the other two, he said lightly :

"Well, you two will have to play at being cooks now, while we look after the ship. So, go down and see what you can find for breakfast. It's clear there is no immediate danger."

Thus reassured, Vanina and her younger brother descended into the cabin and busied themselves in setting it to rights, and doing their best to prepare a meal.

But no sooner had they gone than Dareville took Owen by the arm and led him into the bows of the vessel, so as to be well out of hearing; then he turned and looked at him, his face all white.

"No immediate danger," he repeated, in a hard, bitter voice. "No; but may the great God above help us!"

"Why," Owen exclaimed, alarmed, "what do you mean? Where are we?"

"Where are we?" repeated the other between his

teeth. "Why, hard and fast in the Sargasso Sea!"

"The Sargasso Sea. But what is that?" asked Wydale wonderingly.

"It is," said Dareville, in a despairing tone, "a vast tract of ocean adjacent to the Caribbean Sea, a region that has been called—and for only too good reason—the maritime graveyard of half the world. It is a gigantic trap, of such tenacity, that, if a vessel once gets caught in it, never will it let her go. Here, on all sides of us—if it were but clear enough to see—are untold scores of ships that have been caught and imprisoned, and have lain rotting for long ages; and here shall we also be held fast, to starve to death, and then lie and rot, as many and many another doomed wretch has starved, and died, and rotted here."

CHAPTER III.

A MARINE GRAVEYARD.

IN the midst of the Atlantic Ocean, in the region lying between the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico on the west, and the west coast of Africa on the east, is a vast expanse, never traversed by ship or steamer, and known as the Sargasso Sea. It would scarcely interest the reader, perhaps, to give here a detailed explanation of the curious system of ocean-currents to which, according to some scientists, the phenomenon owes its existence. Suffice it to say that here is a region extending over an area of many hundreds—some even estimate thousands—of square miles, so choked with seaweed that no vessel or boat can sail, steam, or row in it; and few who once get entangled in it ever return to tell the tale. There are, indeed, accounts of some who have attempted to explore this unknown waste, but none have succeeded in penetrating very far from the outer edge or fringe, and these adventurers experienced such difficulty in regaining the open waters as effectually to deter them from making any further expedition of the kind. In more than one such case, indeed, the explorers almost gave up the hope of ever escaping from the weed's fatal embrace. These adventurers describe the region as unique in its strange isolation

and oppressive silence and stagnation. Here no waves ever foam or tumble, no spray ever leaps into the air, flashing and glittering in the sunlight; no raging sea disturbs the everlasting calm. But the calm that reigns unchallenged here is like unto the silence of the grave; it is, indeed, a veritable graveyard for unknown legions of the vessels of all nations. Abandoned at sea, hundreds, thousands of miles away, after years of lonely drifting from all quarters of the world, they find here their final resting-place. In every direction it is a scene of unutterable desolation, shunned, it is said, even by the sea-birds. No doubt the greater part of the hulks here entangled are abandoned vessels—derelicts; no doubt, also, if they could be approached and boarded, they would repay the adventurers with almost untold wealth. Those who abandoned them could not have carried with them the cargoes, scarcely even any of the treasure they were freighted with. Those were indeed fortunate who escaped with life, for terrible tales are told—and with only too much probability—of vessels held fast in the tenacious grasp of the clinging weed, having still on board unhappy creatures whose fate one cannot contemplate without a shudder.

Such being the reputation borne by this dismal tract of weed-strewn ocean, it is small matter for wonder that Sydney Dareville, in spite of the ready courage that was one of his foremost qualities, felt appalled at their position. Speculation as to the cause, and what had become of the skipper and crew, became a matter of but slight interest, compared with the grim fact of the hopelessness of their condition. Nor needs one feel surprised that he should have felt

too utterly crushed, for the time being, to give his mind to plans for their escape. But Owen Wydale, of tougher stuff, would not abandon hope. His was one of those sturdy, British spirits of whom it has been said that they never know when they are beaten; and his brain was already busy studying the situation in all its bearings.

While talking, the two were startled by hearing a deep-drawn breath behind them, and, looking round, saw Vanina standing near, with a face that was both pale and anxious. Yet, though her cheeks blanched when she grasped the danger they were in—for she had heard what had been said—the steady look in her candid eyes showed that she had no thought of breaking down beneath the trial.

“You here, Vanina?” exclaimed Dareville. “I thought you were—”

“I came up to ask you a question—but it does not matter now. I heard what you said. Can it be true? Is there nothing to be done?”

“I can see—can think of—nothing,” he answered wearily, almost listlessly. “It is a cruel—an inconceivably cruel—cowardly business. If we had a full crew, and boats, and a good wind, even then it would be an almost hopeless undertaking to try to get out from here into the open sea. Situated as we are, you can judge for yourself.”

Here Wydale, who had been looking very hard in one direction, turned to go below, saying he “would be back directly.” After an absence of a few minutes he returned, carrying a pair of binocular glasses and a telescope.

“The murdering, thieving hounds missed these,

A Marine Graveyard.

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anyhow," he observed shortly, and fell to studying the scene before them, at one time through the glasses, at another through the telescope.

The position of the brig was this. She was surrounded on all sides by the tangled masses of weed, but, not far away in front of her—straight, that is to say, from her bows—was an open channel of clear water. Up this she had doubtless drifted, and then, through a turn in the channel, had been thrown, either by the wind or her own impetus, into a sort of backwater; and this once entered, the weed had closed round her and held her fast. The channel of open water was but a dozen yards or so away; but, in her present plight, she was as hopelessly shut off from it as though the distance had been a mile, or as though imprisoned in a great iron cage. This channel stretched away with a curve to left and to right, and was finally lost in each direction in the haze. A dull, moaning noise in the distance indicated that the open sea was within hearing, and that waves were there breaking, probably upon some rocky reef; but the sound was so faint it was difficult to determine the side from which it really came.

Wydale had observed attentively all these points, and he now, as stated, studied the outlook carefully and patiently through the instruments he had hunted out. Then he laid them down, and again disappeared into the cabin.

The others took up the glasses, and through them viewed the expanse of green by which they were surrounded. Then Vanina gave a little cry.

"See!" she exclaimed. "See! What is that over

there? 'Tis a ship in full sail! We can surely attract her attention."

Dareville turned his glass in the direction indicated, then laid it down with a gesture of despair.

"It is, as you say, a ship in full sail," he answered, with a shrug; "but she moves not, nor will she ever sail again. Judging by what I can make out, she has been standing thus, in full sail, for many a long day; only in this cursed sea of deadly calm no hurricane has ever come to blow her poor old sails away. If you look around, you will see other miserable wrecks, mostly old, battered, decaying hulks. As well expect help from them as from yonder 'ship in full sail!' Even such a breeze as you can now feel, slight as it is, is a novelty—according to what I have heard—in this hope-forsaken region."

And Vanina felt her heart sink while she listened to his words; and she laid the glasses down, infected, too, with his feeling of dull, cold despair.

Meantime Wydale had returned, carrying an armful of the broken pieces of furniture with which they had forced their way out of the cabin. These pieces of wood he began to throw energetically overboard, sending them far enough to fall beyond the weed into the open channel. Then he snatched up a pair of glasses, and attentively watched them. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"I thought so!" he cried out. "See, Dareville! Look! Those pieces are floating away. Not fast; but you can see they are moving along. There is a current there. I thought just now I could detect it; but it runs so smoothly I could not feel certain. Now, however, you can see it clearly enough. See where

that first piece has floated to ? It's going faster now ; that's because there's more current out in the middle. Jupiter ! If we could but get out into that channel ! ”

Dareville laughed.

“ What then ? ” he asked. “ Firstly, we can't get there ; secondly, do you think we could sail and tack the brig in a waterway thirty or forty feet wide, and with but two of us to manage her, too ? ”

“ Don't you see,” urged Wydale, disregarding his half-contemptuous manner, “ that that current *must* lead somewhere, and where to, if not the open sea ? With but the least bit of ‘ way ’ on her, and this wind behind her, we might keep her in the middle of the channel ; and that may be all we need do. I fancy the wind must have changed since she drifted in here. It blew her in here then ; *now* it would take her back into the current.”

“ But how can we get her there ? ” said Dareville, looking over the vessel's side at the tangled weed. “ If we only had a boat in that open water, now, and a live—”

“ Let's get some sail on her, any way, and try,” Wydale interrupted curtly. “ The wind's the right way, and her head's lying the right way. If we can get her to move at all, it may not be so difficult.”

Unfortunately, to bend a sail of any sort seemed just what could not easily be done. Many of the higher sails had been blown away ; other lower ones seemed to have been deliberately cut away. There were none within reach that could be utilised.

“ Where are the spare sails kept, I wonder ? ” Wydale asked, as he realised all this. Then an idea occurred to him.

"Why, of course! George knows! Where's George? Call him up!" And George, who was below, soon put in an appearance. He had, under one arm, a bundle of wood which he had chopped up to make a fire with, and in the other hand he carried an axe he'd found.

When informed of what was wanted, he entered into the business with alacrity, and, throwing what he was carrying into a corner, quickly showed them where the spare sails and tackle were to be found.

But it took an hour and a half to get even a couple of moderate-sized sails hung out, in very unseaman-like fashion, on the lower yards. But the effect was small. The wind had freshened a little, and the brig yielded slightly to the pressure; but she made no decided way.

Wydale and Dareville got long poles and pushed desperately at the weed in an attempt to clear her bows, but they made no impression on it.

"If we could but get those royals out!" Wydale exclaimed, looking up aloft. These sails had been securely furled before the squall struck the vessel and had escaped damage. "There's more wind up there."

"I believe we could do it," George declared.

"You!" Vanina exclaimed, in alarm. She had been carefully watching all that was going on, and helping where she could. Breakfast had been long before forgotten; no one now thought of eating. Only water had been called for, for the day, though not sunny, was close and hot.

"I've had to do it before to-day in a rough sea," said George. "Surely I can do it now when she's as steady as a telegraph post! I believe it can be done."

"By Jove! but you're right, George," Dareville joined in. "Come on; I'll help, lad! We'll do it between us!"

And in the result, after many patient attempts and much tugging and pulling, and many exclamations, "not loud but deep," from Sydney Dareville, followed by good-tempered laughs from the boy, the sails floated out and were soon hauled taut, amid a little cheer from the two aloft, very heartily taken up by the anxious watchers on deck.

"She's moving!" Vanina cried out, in excitement. "Come down and help here now!"

The two "reefers" came scrambling down, and Dareville took up a pole and set to work to clear the rudder from the weed that clung about it, while Owen worked away with perspiring energy to clear the bows, and George and his sister together took in hand the management of the helm.

And slowly, inch by inch at first, but moving faster as she gathered way, the *Saucy Fan* crept, with a soft, brushing sound, through the greasy masses of weed, and finally, amid the breathless anxiety of those on board, emerged from it into the open channel!

"Hurrah! hurrah! Now, quick! Put her helm over—no, not that way—the other way!" cried Wydale.

"Starboard—no, I mean 'port!' Quick! Pull for your lives!" yelled Dareville.

Amidst these shouts and contradictory directions, the rudder was somehow got into its right direction, and the brig sailed freely and easily along the open channel.

"So far, so good," said Wydale, with a glance of

triumph at Dareville. "This is better than sitting down and twirling our thumbs and waiting for starvation."

"Yes," Dareville assented, "you had the right ideas there, my friend. But now the question is, where are we going to? And if we get to the open sea, how do you suppose we two are going to manage a brig that needs a crew of eight or ten hands?"

"Let us hope—and pray—for the best," said Vanina gravely. "Surely Heaven, that has helped us so wonderfully thus far, will not desert us now!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND.

THE brig sailed on smoothly, easily, with a silent, gliding motion, past endless fields of weed on every side, past many lonely wrecks and forsaken, rotting hulks of what had once been stately, swift-sailing, white-winged ships. These forlorn relics were of all sizes, of all nations, and of every fashion of build known and unknown to those who looked upon them. And the farther they sailed, the older became the type of vessel, till they came to what they took to be old Spanish galleons, and, later, to vessels of still more ancient build. Scattered about were great beams and spars, and numerous small boats, and in the latter—as well as on the decks of some of the larger craft—could be seen, every now and then, little white heaps—all that was left, it was but too painfully obvious, of the bleaching bones of hapless victims of the dread Sea of Sargasso.

Inexpressibly sad, terribly solemn and impressive, were these relics, as they came quietly into view, and passed, silent and ghost-like, away out of sight.

Never, perhaps, has human eye gazed upon scenes more awfully desolate or more eloquent in their weird stillness and slow, unfailing decay. But soon the

attention of the watchers was, perforce, drawn away from these mute memorials of an unknown past to the question that now forced itself upon their minds, "Where were they drifting to?"

Wydale had observed, first with growing surprise, then with alarm, the fact noted above, *viz.*, that the rotting wrecks around them became of a more and more ancient type the further they proceeded. Then he and Dareville happened to glance at one another, and with that the same thought struck each: "Did it not appear as though they were journeying steadily, not to the open sea—as they had fondly hoped—but towards the very heart of this dreary wilderness of weed?"

It had been long after noon when they sailed out into the channel. It was now within an hour of sunset. They could not go on like this in the dark! What was to be done? But just when Wydale, who was steering, called Dareville to him for a whispered consultation, fresh surprises broke upon them. First, the channel along which they were sailing began to widen; then the mist began to clear, and soon they saw dim shapes that rose high in the air straight ahead; these gradually took forms resembling the lofty towers of some mighty castle glistening in the evening sunlight. Slowly, for a while, the mist lifted, then suddenly cleared quite away. At the same time, the channel ended, opening into a large expanse of water that spread out for a mile in front of them, and for two or three miles to their right and left. And now they saw that what they had taken for Titanic towers were the lofty peaks and cliffs of an island, that lay sleeping and smiling, with its green

woods and sandy shore, in the ruddy gold gleams of the setting sun !

A wondrous scene ! A fascinating, an enchanting scene ! And the four on the deck of the gliding vessel gazed upon it as though spell-bound, too astonished, too enraptured, to utter so much as a single word.

Before them was a bay shut in by towering, precipitous rocks that, at each end, came down almost straight into the sea. But, towards the centre, they receded, forming a natural amphitheatre with a wooded ravine in its midst that mounted up, terrace upon terrace, towards the cliffs that rose still higher in the background.

In front of the woods, and in strong contrast to their deep olive tone, was seen the vivid green of a wide strip of greensward, and, in front of this again, a broad belt of tawny-coloured sand.

Through the wood tossed and foamed a torrent of rushing water, while, from the cliffs around, leaped foaming cascades, all finding their way, eventually, into the waters of the bay. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of all this fairy scene was the castellated rocks that reared themselves in stately fashion high above the hanging woods. These shone as though of glass—or crystal, and, in the setting sun, glittered and sparkled with tints of dazzling brightness. But all was still upon this island ; save for the distant murmur of the falling water, and the lap of tiny ripples against the sides of the brig, not a sound was to be heard, and no sign of human presence was to be seen.

“ Well ! ” said Dareville presently, drawing a long

breath, "we've got somewhere at last, anyway! And it strikes me that, unless we mean to run down this charming island (as I suppose it is), and sink it beneath the sad sea waves, before we've had time to overhaul it, we'd better take in sail—or let go the anchor—or 'bout ship—or— Oh, hang the sea slang! What I mean is, we shall be ashore directly, if we don't do something to stop her!"

"We shouldn't hurt much, if we did run ashore on that sand," said Wydale. "However, as we don't know what sort of people live here, and what kind of reception they might give us, perhaps we'd better try to anchor out here for the night. Then we can see about landing in the morning. The breeze has died away; we might let the anchor go first, and take in the sail afterwards—or leave it as it is all night for the matter of that," he added, with a laugh. "We can't possibly hurt here, if we get a good anchorage."

With some trouble they let the anchor go, and the cable ran out with a rattle that was echoed again and again from the opposite rocks, almost like distant thunder. The sound somewhat startled them, and they gazed anxiously along the shore to see whether the noise had caused any movement in the place to show it was inhabited. But, though they looked closely and carefully through the glasses, they saw no trace of a living creature.

The anchor held, and the brig swung easily at the cable end, about a quarter of a mile from land.

"What place can it be?" asked Wydale, much perplexed, while they leaned on the rail, and watched the scene that was growing dimmer in the fast deepening twilight. "Can it be, do you think, that

this is one of the West Indian Islands, and that, after all, it was the Caribbean Sea—not the Sargasso Sea—that we came through?”

“Shooh! No, man!” returned Dareville. “I’ve been through the Caribbean Sea—and more than once. There’s weed there, but nothing like what we’ve come through to-day. Besides, there are no wrecks lying about *there*. This is the region they call the Sargasso Sea, right enough; but what this place in the midst of it can be passes my wit to understand.”

“What place—what island can it be?” Vanina asked, in growing wonder.

Suddenly George clapped his hands. A reminiscence of his *Lemprière* came into his mind.

“I know!” he burst out. “I know! It must be so!”

“What?” queried his sister.

“Atlantis! The lost Island of Atlantis!” he declared enthusiastically.

At this they all laughed heartily, and, it being now nearly dark, they turned slowly to go below to light the cabin lamp, and, at last, get something to eat.

In these latitudes there is but little twilight such as we are accustomed to in England. So soon as the sun goes down, almost instantly it is dark. By the time they reached the cabin stairs they had to grope their way.

“I think,” suggested Wydale, “it would be as well to stuff something into all these ports, and so show no light. If there should be any hostile natives watching us, and thinking of coming off in canoes, it will be more difficult for them to find us in the dark.”

"Don't," cried Vanina, with a shiver. "You upset me again; just, too, when I had got over our terrible fright of the morning."

"It's only a reasonable precaution, though," said Dareville; and the idea was carried out. This work done, he turned to his sister with the words, "We're not out of the wood, yet, you know. Other things apart—if, that is to say, there are no disagreeable inhabitants here, and we don't starve—we don't want to live on a forsaken, desert island all our lives. And for us, unaided, to work this brig out, and back to a port, is a simple impossibility."

This being obviously true, the reminder once more depressed the spirits of the little party, so that they ate their scanty meal almost in silence. Presently, when it was finished, George, full of boyish curiosity, stole quietly up the companion to take a look round. A minute later, his voice was heard calling to the others to come up; and in a few seconds all were again on deck.

"Look, look!" cried the boy excitedly. "The whole place is on fire!"

It was not exactly that; but it certainly looked like it. All around, the water was brilliantly phosphorescent; every tiny ripple was a glowing wavelet of light, that turned the whole area of water into a lake of fiery, waving lines, fringed, where the ripples lapped the shore, with brighter bands. Not only so, but some of the cascades tumbling from the cliffs above seemed to be alight also, and fell like streams of fire, the spray that splashed from rock to rock resembling glowing sparks. And above it all, through the dark sky, appeared, every now and then, darting lurid

flashes like the "Northern Lights," as seen in higher latitudes.

"Whatever does it all mean?" Vanina whispered, in an awestruck voice.

"The stagnant water," Dareville began oracularly, "in this sea of weed, is full of animalculæ, and is strongly phosphorescent. That's—"

"Ah, yes! *that* we can understand," said she, cutting short his intended speech, "I have read it somewhere in a book. But I never heard of such a thing with falling water like this. Besides, you see it is only the case with one or two. The other streams are like ordinary water, quite different from those extraordinary fiery torrents. And those flashing lights, too, what can they be? Is the whole island a volcano in eruption?"

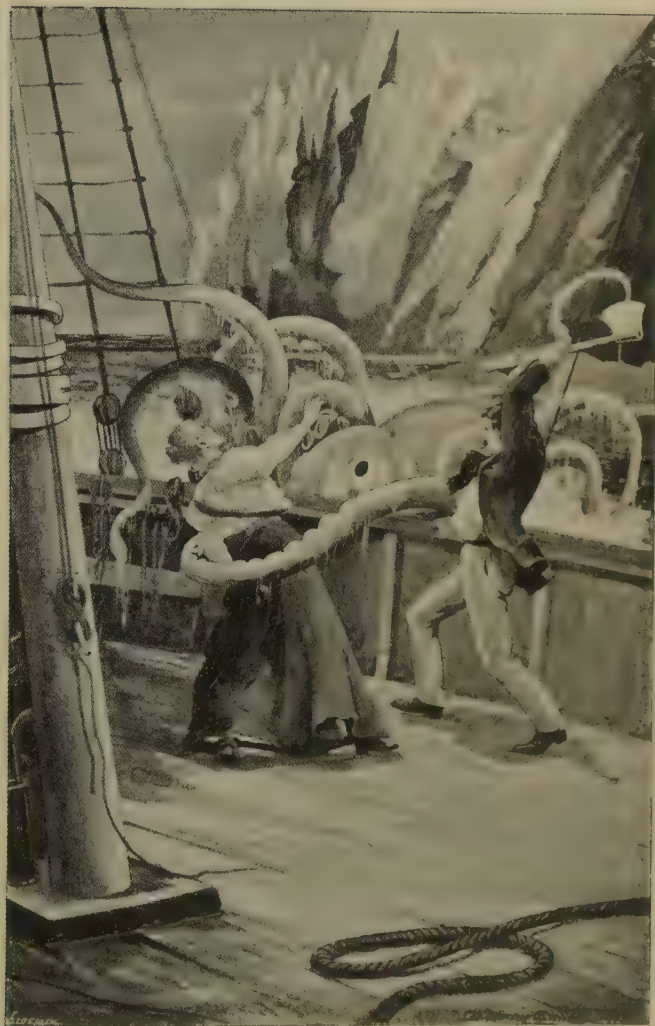
But against this suggestion there was the fact that there were none of the phenomena that go with such eruptions—no noise, no sign of ashes, smoke, or escaping sulphurous gases. Save for the murmuring of the falling water, the whole scene was as still as when they first looked upon it by daylight.

But before any theory or explanation could be advanced by any one of them, their attention was drawn away from the shore by a sound in the opposite direction. It was at first only perceptible as a slight distant rushing and splashing in the water.

Gradually it increased in volume, until it became a kind of low, dull roaring, like the advance of an immense wave; and, mingled with other sounds, could now be heard snorting and strange noises as of a whale, or some such ocean creature, swimming or

struggling, in violent fashion, along the surface of the water. Moving quickly to the opposite side of the deck, the watchers could see a veritable fiery fountain advancing down the channel along which they had sailed earlier in the day. It soon became clear that some great denizen of the deep was making its way towards them, with much tumbling and splashing, and many violent plunges, which sent the phosphorescent water leaping in showers into the air, to fall back in glittering drops upon the gleaming waves around. In a little while, the cause of the disturbance had come out of the channel into the open water, and approached so close to the vessel that it was possible for those on board to make out what was going on. And this is what they saw:—

A great sword-fish, of extraordinary bulk, though armed with a terrible-looking "sword" of at least five feet in length, was struggling in the grasp of a gigantic cuttle-fish. The latter had two of its arms twined like lithe snakes round the body of the fish. Every now and then the latter would leap into the air, endeavouring to fall back (sword-first) upon the body of its enemy, after the manner in which, as is well known, sword-fish will attack and kill the largest whale. But the grasp of the arms around it always threw out its aim, so that it fell back each time into the water between the curling arms of the monster, and well away from its body. And soon the combatants came almost alongside the brig, and, in their furious struggles, even sent the spray up on to the deck. The four onlookers were too much surprised and fascinated by the spectacle to move or even speak. While they watched, they could see



He was only just in time.

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that the sword-fish was growing weaker ; and that gradually more of the arms of the cuttle were coiling, round it. Several of these arms rose in the air, covered with the glittering particles, twisting, writhing, darting to and fro, like horrible fiery serpents, and one by one they fastened with their tenacious grasp upon their plunging victim.

Suddenly, a new sound was heard of some other great body tearing through the water, and another immense cuttle-fish rushed across the bay to the assistance of its mate. It came shooting along the surface, leaving a brilliant path behind it, like a rushing rocket, and launched itself into the fray with a ferocity fearful to behold. To assist its attack it threw two or three of its great arms round the stern-post of the brig, and, with the purchase thus obtained, it laid hold, with the other arms, of the struggling sword-fish, and dragged both the antagonists bodily towards it, shaking the vessel from stem to stern in its exertions. Gradually, the struggles of the victim ceased, and one of the cuttles raised its body out of the water. When its great bulk, with the monstrous, gleaming eyes, as large as saucers, rose above the surface, Vanina, horrified, yet too frightened to move, could not repress a scream. This seemed to awake Wydale and the others almost as from a trance. With a vague idea that she was in danger, the former rushed forward, picking up the axe which he knew George had that morning laid down near the fo'castle, and returned quickly with it to her side. And he was only just in time. The other two had started from the bulwarks out of sight ; but Vanina seemed fascinated by the awful hideousness of the

creature, and remained staring over the side. Evidently the monster had caught sight of her and scented further prey, for, like a flash—more quickly even than the python seizes upon the swift-footed antelope—a long, dark, writhing “tentacle” darted over the rail and twined round her body. But even before the cry that rose to her lips was heard, Owen’s axe had fallen upon the slimy limb and severed it just where it crossed the bulwark; the next moment the part that had taken hold upon her fell, now harmless, on to the deck. Another tentacle flashed across with lightning quickness, this time aimed at Wydale, coiling round his arms in such a manner as to pinion them and prevent his using the axe. Immediately he was, in his turn, dragged against the bulwarks, and he felt himself, despite his struggles to release himself, being lifted irresistibly off his feet; then other arms of the monster were put forth, stretching out ravenously to seize him. Fortunately, Dareville saw his friend’s great peril, and retained his presence of mind. He snatched the axe from Wydale’s now powerless hand, and, with a swing, brought it down, as Wydale had but a minute before, cutting through the second tentacle. The severed portion fell limp and motionless beside the other piece, and the two great cuttles, with a loud splash and a mighty plunge, made off, carrying with them the captured sword-fish.

When Wydale turned to thank his friend, he saw that he was, assisted by George, already half-leading, half-carrying his sister towards the cabin; so he slowly followed them, without stopping to examine the hideous trophies of the encounter that lay on the deck.

CHAPTER V.

A DESERTED CITY.

IT was a gloomy, almost silent, little party that sat down to breakfast the following morning in the chief cabin of the *Saucy Fan*. The two young men had had little sleep, having passed the night, for the most part, in whispered consultation. Ostensibly they were supposed to be keeping watch and sleeping by turns, while Vanina and her younger brother slept on undisturbed ; but, as a matter of fact, they carried out this arrangement only when the night was three-parts spent.

Naturally they were anxious and depressed, though, be it said, more on account of the other two than on their own. Had they but been alone, the spirit of daring and adventure that animates most young Englishmen would have caused them rather to rejoice in than to regret the chance that had placed them in so strange a situation. But placed in an unknown part of the world, inhabited, perhaps, by savage tribes, as it certainly was by grim and ferocious monsters, what chance had they, without firearms, of being able to protect themselves and those with them, if attacked? And then there was the question of food.

Of arms they had practically none ; and the reliance of civilised man, in these days, upon firearms

is so universal that it is astonishing how helpless he becomes without them, when the need arises to defend himself. Prehistoric man, thrown upon a desert island without his accustomed weapons, and with only his hunting knife in his girdle, probably immediately set to work to manufacture bow, arrows, and spears, after his own fashion ; and, if unmolested for a while, was soon as well fitted out for the battle of life as if he had been equipped from one of the primitive arsenals of his own country. Nowadays things are different indeed, for when the unarmed, civilised man is cast upon the desert island, amongst uncivilised foes, the latter are more at home in more senses than one, and have very much the best of it, without counting numbers.

No wonder, therefore, that the two on whom the safety of the whole party rested felt oppressed by the sense of their own helplessness. If they were not to starve to death, the food they already had in the brig must be supplemented by supplies of some kind from the land and sea around them ; that was clear. But to obtain these exploration was essential ; and to explore an unknown country without arms is about as severe a test of the civilised man's courage and resource as they can well be subject to. Both Wydale's and Dareville's thoughts ran continually upon the difficulty they had here to face, for both knew there were no arms amongst the cargo.

Presently, while they sat at breakfast, Vanina broke the silence with a little laugh. The others looked up in surprised inquiry.

"I was thinking," she explained, "how very much I must have fallen in Mr. Wydale's estimation last

night. He said once he thought I had the face and figure of an Amazon—”

“Not at all,” Owen hastily interrupted. “I did not say ‘Amazon’; I said ‘Warrior Queen.’”

“Ah, well, it’s the same thing here. I fear I did not show more pluck or spirit than the proverbial woman confronted by a mouse.”

“The occasion was exceptional,” Wydale returned gravely. “It was something more than a mouse that attacked you. Many a man so situated would have given way to panic. You, at least, did not do that; and you did not faint. You behaved extremely well, I think.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so,” she replied more seriously. “I feel we shall have many dangers to face here; and this is no time for a woman to give way to ‘nerves.’ You shall find me different in future—at least I hope so. But, you see, last night the incident was so sudden, the sight of the horrid monster so unexpected, and it looked doubly, trebly ghastly lighted up so fitfully and strangely by the beams from the splashing water. Ugh! I can see it even now.” And she shuddered, and passed her hand before her eyes as if to shut out the sight. After a pause, she went on: “But in future I mean to be brave.”

“It will only be your natural spirit, sister, if you are,” George interrupted. “Don’t you remember that time when the rattlesnake—”

She interrupted him quickly in her turn. “Never mind that now, George. We have something else to think of. Are there then no arms amongst the cargo?”

Sydney Dareville sighed disconsolately.

"No," he said, with a troubled look, "that's the worst of it. There are none at all."

"None—absolutely *none*?" Vanina repeated.

"None, I am sorry to say. You see—"

"But what *is* in the cargo?" then she went on. "Most of it belongs to you and your friend, you told me—and Mr. Wydale saw it all put in. Are you *sure* there may not be a case of revolvers and cartridges?"

Sydney shook his head. "I feel more vexed and upset about it than you can think," he explained; "for it is my fault that there are none; at least," he added, hesitating, "it was more Ridgway's than mine."

"Ridgway's!" exclaimed Vanina, in surprise.

"Why, yes; this was how it was. Mr. Cassella gave me a list of articles I was to be sure to ship. As to others, he left that to my discretion. Well, I thought of a lot of other things sure to sell well out there, and amongst them firearms of different kinds. But, when I spoke to Ridgway, he advised me not to take anything in that line. He said they were themselves sending a consignment, and that therefore it would not be worth our while. So I struck out the firearms."

"But how were they sending them?" Wydale asked.

"That I can't say," replied the other, and then paused thoughtfully. "Do you know," he went on, after a short space, "I couldn't understand Ridgway at all. I am half inclined to think he was playing some game of his own, that even the partners in the firm knew nothing of."

"How do you mean? what sort of a game?"

"Ah, that I do not know. But there was something

mysterious in connection with the *Saucy Fan* before the cargo was stored in her; and strange to say, I don't think Blane was in it. That Blane is a scoundrel, a would-be, cold-blooded murderer—it's no use mincing the fact, Vanina—we all know too well; and I don't believe much in either Armitage or Ridgway. But what I really fancy is that, while the other two were planning a deep and wicked game of their own, Ridgway was busy on another of *his* own. Those mysterious hints that I received, I am convinced they were well founded, in the light of what has since occurred."

"I see—or at least I, I think, begin to understand—a little," said Vanina musingly. "That there must have been a plot is clear. You think there may also have been an underplot of Ridgway's. I wish I could think better of my step-father; but I cannot. But no more on that score now; what I want to know is, what *is* the cargo? You forget you haven't told me yet."

"We have lists of everything," replied her brother, laughing, "and it will amuse you to hear what that consists of. Never, I should say, if you except fire-arms—was a more comprehensive list of articles, useful and the reverse, carried by any ship that ever sailed."

"Let us know first what 'useful' things you have," Vanina said. "The rest can wait."

"I'm afraid I can't; they're all so mixed up in the lists." Dareville pulled out a pocket book. "See here, for instance. This is only one short list. It relates to a few articles for a customer of Mr. Cassella's—a showman—keeps what they call in America, a 'Dime Museum.' I suppose the novelty of his show was wearing off, and the dollars were not pouring in

quite so fast ; so he asked us to send him out a few waxworks of celebrities who, though tolerably well-known in Europe, would attract out there ; and anything else we thought might draw. Here are some of his consignments :—penny-in-the-slot-machines, with working models, and so on ; a few fireworks ; some stuffed animals from Africa, magic-lanterns, and dissolving views apparatus with a case of slides ; Mary Queen of Scots—”

“ Mary Queen of Scots ! ” Vanina cried. “ What’s that ? Now you are laughing at me, Sydney.”

“ Upon my honour, no. He wanted some new waxworks, you must know, and was very particular that we should include Mary Queen of Scots and Lucretia Borgia. You know Lucretia Borgia has been whitewashed—”

“ Lucretia Borgia whitewashed ? ”

“ Certainly ! Haven’t you read all about it ? Every historic villain gets whitewashed nowadays. Anyway, it’s the case with her ; and it’s roused up a new interest in the lady over there. But, besides Mary Queen of Scots, there are, amongst the waxworks, a model of ‘ The Sleeping Beauty,’ and some of the kings and queens of England—a few old ones, I believe, to take the place of some that have got damaged. There’s King John, and Richard Cœur de Lion ; and Boadicea, the famous British Queen, resplendent in a suit of mail, with a helmet on her head, and brandishing a spear, *à la* Britannia—”

Here Wydale glanced with a mischievous smile at Vanina, who flushed up.

“ Oh, leave that, and go on to other things,” Vanina interposed.

"Very well," agreed Sydney, glancing down his list. "Here are some more of the items. First, there are some pianos and musical instruments of various kinds, including musical-boxes; then come cutlery—knives and forks and so on—and crockery; there are umbrellas, and boots, and shoes; paint boxes and cameras, and photographic, as well as chemical, apparatus; telephones and phonographs; a large collection of mounted photographs of objects and places of interest in Europe; there are rat and mouse traps, and watches and clocks; opera and field glasses, and telescopes; there are reaping and mowing machines, and an ice-making machine—"

"I wish we could put it into use and have some ice here," sighed George.

"You can't get at it; it's half-way down in the hold. Then there's a case of stationery, pens, paper, ink, a large number of books of various kinds, and even a small hand-printing press; there's a portable steam-engine and boiler, and a steam launch—"

"A steam launch; can't we get at that?"

"By and by. If we can find anything to feed it with, it may be useful. Either coal or petroleum can be used as fuel. There are diving dresses, and some wood-cutting machinery. There are harpoons and 'tubes' to shoot them from—but useless without powder; a large quantity of oiled silk—intended for the construction of a war-balloon, I fancy, and some life-saving rockets. These last are packed away at the very bottom, else we could get them out. They might be useful on occasion instead of firearms."

When he had finished, Vanina remained silent a while. Then she observed :

"As you said, a curious collection. And to think that amongst it all we have no arms!"

"Yes; and no clothes either," George put in.

"You're right, Georgy," agreed Sydney. "Ah! it's a great oversight; almost as bad as the absence of arms. If, for instance, this island should prove uninhabited, and we have to spend here the remainder of our lives—or even a few years—what on earth shall we do for clothes? To be sure, there are the dresses of the wax figures. But it would be funny, wouldn't it? Fancy Wydale and myself, for instance, strutting about in this lonely island, dressed as King John and Richard Cœur de Lion, and—you—Vanina as—as—"

"As Boadicea, the warrior queen," edged in Wydale, laughing, and looking at Vanina. "It'll have to come to that, after all, I do believe! It's fated. Many a true word's spoken in jest, you know."

And Vanina coloured up, and rose hastily from the little table. Then the "council" broke up, and they set seriously to work to solve the problem that lay first before them—how to get ashore to explore the land around, without running the brig aground. In the absence of a boat it was not an easy matter to accomplish. However, they managed to shift the anchor nearer the shore and get the vessel close in at the very end of the cable. Thus they would be able to pull her out into deeper water, if occasion should arise, by simply winding in the cable. Then they set to work to make a raft, and on this Wydale and Dareville made their way to the shore, taking with them a stout line attached to the brig's stern. This, when they had landed, they proceeded to make fast round

a great boulder that lay on the beach. This sufficed to hold the vessel steadily in the position that was most convenient to them in the circumstances, and also enabled trips to and fro on the raft to be more easily made, since they had only to ferry themselves across by holding on to and pushing against the rope.

By the time this work had been completed, they were well into the afternoon, and it was clear that very little more could be done that day. It was deemed advisable, however, to take a look round the bay; in particular, to search about for signs of natives. A hunt through the brig for arms had brought to light only two more axes and an old, half-rusty cutlass. They discovered also a small keg of gunpowder, brought, no doubt, for use with the brass carronade that was carried in the bows. All other ammunition the crew had taken away.

"Just enough powder for a few charges, I reckon; but no shot of any kind," muttered Dareville, in disgust. "We might cast some rough shot possibly—we've plenty of lead on board—and thus we might find the little cannon of some use, if there are savages here. But we can't carry it about with us."

In the end, the piece was loaded with powder only; a few pebbles of the most appropriate shape obtainable were selected and put aside to be used as shot, if needed. For signalling purposes the explosion of the powder only would suffice.

Owen and Dareville drew lots to decide which should start first upon the work of exploration. It fell to the latter, and it was agreed that he should take up the task that day and the next, and that

then, should occasion call for it, Wydale should devote a day or two to going still farther afield.

In the trips to and fro on the raft, a sharp look-out was kept for the dreaded cuttles ; but no more was seen of them.

Just before sunset Dareville returned, bringing with him a number of oranges he had found growing wild. He had traversed the bay from end to end at each point, being prevented from going farther by the rocks that ran out into the sea. Then he had ascended the ravine by the side of the watercourse which flowed down it, and, after a stiff climb over the cliffs at the top, had obtained a view of an extensive country lying beyond in a sort of basin. He had also seen a lake in the distance, and what looked like buildings beside it. But it having been agreed that he should return before dark, he had then retraced his steps to the shore. Of inhabitants he had come across no sign.

"But," he observed, "the place either is inhabited or *has* been. It may now be deserted by those who once lived here ; but I am confident that the way by which I ascended was once a path and made by man. There are groves, too, as of trees that had been carefully planted and tended in former years, but now it is all overgrown and gone to ruin. It was there I gathered the oranges ; they are only half wild. There were other fruits, too, which I could not reach, and were quite new to me. To-morrow I propose to start at dawn and go to the lake I saw, and ascertain whether there are really any buildings there. It may have been a mirage. All that we know is this : we are here on a tropical island in the midst of the Sar-

gasso Sea, an island whose existence has never been suspected, an island, too, that has been, and may be still, inhabited. Therefore I advise that we all stick closely to the ship so far as may be possible, till we know more about the place."

"What makes those cliffs up there shine and sparkle so?" Vanina asked.

"Ah! I forgot that. The rocks are almost wholly crystal; some quite clear and white, others coloured—transparent as glass—some opaque and semi-opaque; but all beautiful in the extreme. I have never seen anything like it."

"And the falling water that is luminous at night; what of that?" asked Owen.

"I could not get to it; it falls from an orifice in the face of a precipice of the crystal rock, at the back of a deep fissure."

"And you saw no animals, small or large?"

"Well, yes, some small ones; rabbits, or something of the kind. I saw some snakes, too. These and some birds were the only signs of life."

The night passed without incident, and at dawn—which broke a little before six o'clock—they were all astir; and then Sydney, after an early meal, prepared to start upon a further journey of discovery. This time he slung a bag over his shoulders, and in it placed some provisions for the day.

"And it will be useful," observed Vanina, referring to the bag, "to bring back some more oranges in. Mind you fill it; those you brought us last night were delicious."

"Yes," Wydale added. "And, if you could only knock over two or three rabbits, or some birds, or



something to provide us with a little fresh meat, it would be better still. Oh, for a fowling piece!"

During the day Wydale and the others occupied themselves in many ways. With some of the spare sails they rigged up an awning over the deck. Then they started fishing, and caught a good supply, a few of which they cooked, when finding them good to eat, they captured some more to be ready for a meal for Sydney when he returned. Next they went along the shore in search of oysters, and returned laden with as many as they could carry.

In the afternoon, Owen and Vanina found themselves sitting, somewhat tired, under the awning, watching George, who was still hunting about for oysters in the water, with bare legs and feet, a short distance away.

"Do you think," Vanina laughed, "that we shall really have to pass the remainder of our lives out here, as Sydney was so dismally prophesying yesterday?"

Owen shook his head and sighed.

"Who can say?" he answered. "It may turn out so. It needs no special knowledge to see that the difficulties for working the brig out are practically insuperable. Still, we sha'n't starve, that is now clear. And, since that is so, I would not, myself, very much care, if only—" He paused and sighed again.

"If only—what?" Vanina asked, glancing at him with the roguish look that, at times, came into her eyes.

"If only I knew how much you liked me," he returned impulsively.

‘You are bold, Mr. Wydale,’ said his companion, looking down in a thoughtful way. But she did not seem displeased, so Wydale thought, and he felt encouraged to go on.

“Bold or desperate—call it which you will,” he said, with sudden passion. “You must well know how I feel towards you. From the moment I saw your portrait in the hands of your young brother, the day I first took charge of him, I have been madly in love with you, and every day since has made me—”

“Hold!” she said, lifting up her hand. “You must not say such words to me. And you talk foolishly, too. You declare you—well, say—liked me since first you happened to see my portrait, and you assert that I must ‘know’ it. But how could I possibly know anything of the kind?”

She spoke softly, and gazed dreamily across the bay at the green woods and cool-looking stream that lay smiling in the sunlight.

“Know?” repeated Wydale, seizing her hand in his. “Ah! you know only too well. You saw it the first time I fixed my eyes upon you. You have seen it ever since, in every look I have given you, every word I have spoken, every—oh, Miss Dareville—Vanina—speak to me—say something to end this suspense—tell me—tell me—do you—do you—like me a little?”

He had passed an arm round her and drawn her closer, she not resisting. George had gone up out of the water to the shade of some trees further away, where he was busy putting on his shoes and stockings. Screened as they were by the bulwarks, he could not see how they were engaged.

Owen drew her closer, and still she did not resist. She could even feel his breath upon her cheek ; it blew about a few stray hairs, and she knew he was gazing at her with eager eyes ; but she avoided meeting them.

"Of course I *like* you," she replied, looking down and toying with the end of a rope that hung from the rail. "Who could help doing so, after what you did for Georgy ? We are both grateful, and—"

"For Heaven's sake, Vanina, do not trifle with me!" Owen burst out. "Grateful ! Do you suppose I am talking now about gratitude ? You know I am not. Still," he went on more calmly, and with sadness in his voice, "I know that perhaps I have no right to address you thus. I am poor, and you, I have been told, are rich ; and it might seem wrong of me to speak, only that we are thrown here into a strange place, and may never see the old countries again. That seems to me to alter matters greatly. It was *that* that made me speak," he added rather apologetically, "and if I have offended you—"

She turned to him with a flushed face, and one of her wonderful smiles.

"No," she said, "you have not offended me. One who acted as you did towards Georgy could hardly do that. But don't you think you are acting very foolishly, and—prematurely ? We don't know what may be before us, what perils may be in store for us. Is this a time and place to talk in such a style, dear friend ? Cannot we be close friends—*dear* friends even, if you will—without talk of love ? "

She looked so charming, so enticing, that Owen could not resist a sudden impulse.

"Be it so for the present," he said gaily, "we will be friends—*dear* friends—but you will seal the bargain with a kiss?" and he drew her face to him and kissed her.

Up sprang Vanina, but what she was about to say remained unsaid; for just then they heard George's voice, and saw him get up and come towards the shore in the direction of the ship.

"Here is Georgy," Vanina said, looking at Wydale reproachfully, and with a flushing face.

"The meeting then broke up in some confusion," he quoted, looking at her mischievously, "and it hereby stands adjourned, until—"

But she had moved away, and was calling out to George, who had now come within speaking distance. And so it was that no date was fixed upon for the resumption of this important conference.

Towards evening, Dareville returned, and he brought back startling news; he had discovered a deserted city beside the lake he had seen in the distance on the previous day.

"It is a wonderful place," he told them, "simply wonderful! Full of ancient temples, and palaces, and buildings that must once have been of great magnificence and beauty, but now are falling into ruins. They look, nevertheless, as if they had been abandoned in quite modern times; perhaps but a few years ago. I saw traces of ornamental gardens, of parks, groves and fields, and meadows. On all sides there are evidences of former careful cultivation, but none, that I could detect, of living people."

"Where, then, can they have gone to—and when?" Vanina wondered.

The question could not be answered. But it afforded ample food for speculation for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VAMPIRE.

WHEN, the following morning, Owen prepared to set out on a further reconnoitring expedition, according to the arrangement that had been come to, George begged very hard to be allowed to bear him company. At first this was refused, but, after some discussion, leave was granted. They had now all come to the conclusion that the place was uninhabited; that there was, therefore, no danger to be apprehended from hostile natives. An hour after dawn they started, Wydale taking with him—as Dareville had the day before—only an axe, the old cutlass by way of arms, the marine glasses, and some bags containing food.

They mounted, without much difficulty, the rough path beside the water-course, and found their way over the cliffs at the summit. It was somewhat arduous work: more by reason of the heat than from the difficulties of the road itself. These would have been greater but for the track which had been constructed at some former time. They thus found their way directly enough to the heights; and there the path led them through a pass, flanked on each side by still higher rocks of glittering crystal, that led to the edge of the plain or basin that

A Queen of Atlantis.

lay beyond. Here an extensive prospect opened out before their eyes, and far away they could see the lake that had been described, glistening like a sheet of burnished silver in the sunlight. It lay far below, and the road to it—which was still fairly clear, and easy to follow—skirted the margin of a stream that tumbled and foamed as it leapt from rock to rock. The heat increased as the sun rose higher in the heavens, and the two were often glad to make a halt under trees on the river bank to rest, and enjoy draughts of the clear, cool water, or to eat one of the oranges they had plucked upon their way ; for of this fruit there was a plentiful supply. As they drew nearer to the lake, the ruined buildings of the deserted city came more clearly into view, and, after a march of nearly three hours from the time of leaving the shore, they reached them.

It certainly was, as Dareville had described it, a wonderful place. Once upon a time it must have been a flourishing, populous and wealthy city ; but there was more than this to be deduced from an attentive study of the buildings, and more particularly of the interiors of the great palaces and temples. The magnificence of those—faded, falling to ruin, yet always grand and impressive in the story that they told—astonished Wydale, and excited his ever-increasing wonder, as he made his way about them.

There were exquisitely carved bas-reliefs, statues and pillars ; and coloured frescoes, too, depicting battles, pictures of the sea with quaint, old-world, little ships, and other scenes, all telling of a white race—now apparently vanished—that had peopled the land in former times ; a race that must have had

their armies, their horsemen and chariots, their war fleets, and their trading ships, their battles by land and sea, their triumphs, and their slaves and captives—all this and more was depicted on those walls with wondrous artistic skill, and in colours that were even now distinct and even brilliant.

Though partly prepared by Dareville's description, Wydale was utterly astonished at all he saw; and, so fascinating did he find the study of those surprising relics, that the hours slipped by almost unnoticed. Even his young companion was impressed and interested, though he could not altogether grasp the true significance of all around him.

They sat down in the grateful shade of a group of cedars that stood near the edge of the lake. It had probably once been the fair garden of a stately pile that raised its towers and massive walls close by. There they made a light meal upon the food they had brought with them, and then resumed their exploration of the ruins.

They wandered by marble mausoleums and sculptured tombs, that spoke of the mighty dead of a mysterious past; and so on through palace courtyards and broad terraces with wide flights of steps that extended to the water's edge, till they came to the outskirts, where green fields and groves of fruit-bearing trees took the place of the deserted buildings.

Here Owen, looking round, saw at some distance the heights that, presumably, shut off the valley they were in from the sea to the south.

"We had better climb yonder rocks, George," he now said. "From there we should be able to get a

view of the line of coast on this side. Do you think it will be too tiring for you? Remember, we shall have to go all the way back."

But the boy protested that he felt quite equal to the exertion, and accordingly the two proceeded in the direction of the heights.

Wydale's thoughts were full of the scenes he had just left, and of all kinds of quaint fancies they had evoked. To most minds such ruins must ever possess a solemn and profound attraction, suggesting thoughts of the past that sadden, while they interest. In the present instance the feeling of melancholy, hard to repress when it comes over one, was heightened by the strange apparent loneliness and isolation of the whole island itself. They had seen many gruesome monuments of a forgotten past in the poor deserted hulks that had lain along their route to the island; but these had seemed almost an appropriate feature in that desolate, silent wilderness of weed. Here, where smiling, murmuring streams ran from the hillside into the sleeping lake, where the whole landscape spoke of walks, and groves, and gardens that had once been the delight of the few who walked in them and the envy of the many who gazed upon them from afar, where soaring edifices and towering palaces told of wealth, of pomp, of pride, of power—the contrast suggested by its present utterly forsaken condition was at once more startling, more impressive, more awe-inspiring.

Occupied by thoughts and feelings such as these, and having no watch to refer to, Wydale noticed neither that the afternoon was fast wearing on nor that a dull haze was creeping over the landscape.

The two continued on their way towards the heights, but as the ground began to rise, the journey became steeper and more difficult at almost every step. Road or path there was none ; huge masses of rock that had fallen from above were scattered here and there in wild confusion, necessitating détours ; while their direct route would be obstructed at other times by deep gullies or fissures. While they were thus absorbed in picking their way with no more definite idea than that of reaching the ridge and looking beyond it, the mist crept up to them, and soon shut out from sight every object around them, save those almost within reach. And even these at last disappeared. The mist, indeed, soon became so dense, that it seemed to wrap them round as with a cloak, and overhead it hung like a sombre, threatening cloud.

And now they found themselves in considerable difficulty. It was alike impossible either to proceed, or to return. It was, indeed, dangerous even to move, for at any moment they might be precipitated into one of the fissures that they knew were all around them.

Owen looked about him in some dismay.

" I fear there is nothing to be done, but to sit down and wait for this mist to clear," he observed ruefully. " And that may mean passing the whole night here. I was wrong to have ventured so far in face of the gathering fog."

" Well, it isn't cold, Mr. Wydale," George returned philosophically. " And, as there's no one about to interfere with us, we can't hurt much."

" No, but they will be anxious—alarmed, on board the brig," reminded Owen.

"But they will understand that we couldn't get back through such a fog as this," the optimist consolingly suggested.

But to proceed was quite impossible, so the two sat down on a ledge of rock to wait with such patience as they could command. They made a little meal upon what they had left, obtained with some difficulty a draught of water from a rivulet they could hear trickling close at hand, and then Wydale filled his pipe and smoked in contemplative silence. As is often the case with mountain mists, there was light enough to read by, though it seemed dark and gloomy compared with the glare of the sun in the earlier part of the day. So George took out a little book to read. He had found it—several, in fact—in the seamen's quarters on board the *Saucy Fan*.

Being chiefly concerned with tales of pirates, sea-thieves, and other desperadoes, it naturally had an irresistible attraction for the finder. He had carried the whole batch off to his own cabin, and afterwards had always kept one in his pocket for reading in his spare moments.

How long they remained thus silent neither could afterwards exactly say. Wydale had lost himself in a day-dream with which George's sister had probably much to do. George had reached a most exciting point in the story he was reading—when the hero, a boy of thirteen, spits a few burly ruffians, half-a-dozen or thereabouts, on his cutlass at one thrust—when, in the stillness around them, they distinctly heard the sound of voices.

In an instant Wydale was on the alert, and had put a firm grasp on the shoulder of the boy as a

warning to be silent. Then they sat still and listened.

Again the voices could be heard, this time a little nearer, but not near enough for them to distinguish what was said. Only one thing was clear to Wydale's mind. There were two or more men close to them in the fog; therefore there must be people on the island after all! At the same moment another idea came into his mind. Might not these people be foes in search of them? Perhaps, while he and his companion had deemed themselves unseen, someone living farther away might have marked them down, noted the direction they had taken, and might be now furtively following and seeking them with hostile purpose. If so, the sudden mist had, in reality, been a boon, for it had hidden them in friendly fashion from lurking foes.

He signalled to George to be absolutely silent, and to get up. Then both rose and stood listening and peering anxiously through the fog. It was very dark now and very quiet, and for a space they heard not a sound. Then the voices were once more heard, this time a little nearer and somewhat raised. Apparently the speakers were engaged in a dispute.

Suddenly Wydale heard a faint rushing sound as of a wind or strong current of air. It grew rapidly louder, and seemed to be approaching them; and now it could be heard almost close at hand like unto the mighty wings of some unseen monster of the air, of a size far beyond any known earthly bird. Most strange of all, a cold, sickly horror seized upon the two. It was a feeling of nausea such as might be caused by an aroma of intolerable foulness, and with

it the sensation of repulsion and disgust that a human being has for a loathsome, unclean thing. It was the feeling that might be roused in one who, lying awake and still in the middle of the night, suddenly feels the cold, slimy touch of a snake, of whose size or nature he is ignorant, slowly creeping over or winding round him. And, under the influence of this deadly feeling, both Owen and his young companion found themselves fast held as in a vice.

All power of motion, of speech, almost even of thought, seemed gone from them. They could only wait and listen helplessly for some greater horror which they instinctively divined was yet to come, against which they were powerless even to struggle. And, during a space that seemed like hours, but was measured only by seconds, the rushing sound came nearer and nearer, and seemed to be almost upon them, when all at once it ceased.

Then there arose on the heavy air a cry, a shriek, so appalling, so full of utter, hopeless agony and horror that it struck to the very hearts of the two listeners, almost like a stab from an actual dagger. Still they had no power to move, and only could stand motionless, and wait and listen.

The cry was not repeated, and for a while all was silent; but presently could be heard low, indistinct sounds, the nature of which Wydale could but dimly guess at. But in his own mind he could only compare them to the rending of flesh by claws or beak, or both.

George turned upon Wydale a face of ghastly whiteness, and sank helpless to the rock he had just been seated on, and Wydale, with an effort, roused

himself and caught the lad before he fell. He laid him gently down and knelt beside him, too dazed and still too sick and faint to be able to gather his own thoughts, and quite unable to cast off the paralysing spell that had seized upon his faculties.

And thus the minutes passed. To the two hapless listeners the time seemed an eternity ; but it was brought to an end by the lifting of the mist. Slowly at first, but swiftly a little later, it grew thinner, then drifted away before a light breeze that had sprung up. Then Owen, gazing with straining eyes in the direction from which had come that awful cry, saw dimly a monstrous shape raise itself on wings almost colossal, and sail heavily away on the breeze into the receding mist, as might a gigantic, gorged vulture after one of its loathsome feasts. Then the paralysing grasp that had laid hold of his very heart-strings was relaxed, the blood resumed its normal course, and he was able to think, to act, to rouse himself.

George also, who had lain like one dead, revived, and, lifting his head, gazed wonderingly around them. Owen put his finger on his lips, and, drawing from his pocket a small flask of brandy he had brought with him for emergencies, poured a little between his lips, and then took some himself.

The mist had now nearly disappeared, and the setting sun was shining brightly when the two finally got upon their feet. Wydale now saw that the rocks beyond were almost perpendicular. The only way out from the *cul de sac* in which they were lay in the direction whence they had heard the voices and that blood-curdling shriek. Now, however, all seemed still around, and he resolved to leave their rocky

labyrinth at once, lest the darkness should prevent them.

Cautiously they moved forward, but had gone only a few steps when, turning the end of a boulder, they came upon a fearful sight. On the ground, right in their path, lay the motionless body of a man. He was on his back, with a great gaping wound in the breast, which looked as though it had been torn open by some ravening beast. To his astonishment, when he examined him more closely, Owen saw that the body was that of one of the ruffian crew of the *Saucy Fan*. He could recognise the face, too, though now distorted and set in such a look of ghastly horror as he had never seen before, and earnestly hoped he might never see again. He would have prevented George from looking at it, but they had to step right over it. Stooping down for a moment to ascertain whether the man was dead, he was attracted by the glitter of something hanging from the trousers' pocket, and he recognised, in another glance, the gold seal on his own watch-chain. He took hold of it, and drew out from the man's pocket his watch and chain together. Glad as he was to recover them, he could scarcely repress a shudder when he noticed that there was blood upon the seal. He wiped it clean, and, slipping it into his own pocket without comment, hurried on after the boy, who had passed on without a pause.

Just when Wydale caught him up, a man crept out from behind a boulder a little way ahead of them. His face was white and haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot ; but they recognised at once, even in the now waning light, Steve Foster, the brutal mate of

the *Saucy Fan*. Evidently he at first scarcely knew what he was doing, but he pulled himself together, and, raising a hand holding a revolver, he called in a hoarse voice to the two to halt.

CHAPTER VII.

MONELLA.

FOR some moments Foster and the other two gazed silently upon each other ; the former was the first to speak.

"If yer comes any further, I shoots," he stuttered. "Ah, yes"—when they halted—"I've got yer at last, 'ave I? Now I guess we can square accounts atween us. I don' know how you got 'ere from the place where we left the *Saucy Fan*—we thought she was safe enuff—but, howsomedever, it won't help you much, 'cos if yer thinks yer've 'scaped, why, yer 'aven't, that's all. I've got a long score to settle wi' you two, an' I mean t' settle it now, to-day, when there's nobody to see or interfere."

Wydale could see the villain was like one drunk, partly with mingled fear and rage, no doubt, but partly, also probably, from strong drink. So unsteady was the hand that held the pistol, and so constantly did the man sway about, that Wydale would have closed with him and risked the consequence had he been alone. But the fear that George might be injured by a stray shot in the scuffle held him back. Meantime the scoundrel gradually pulled himself together, and seemed somewhat to recover his self-control.

"I don' know how you came 'ere," he repeated, "an' I don' care ; but it's so much the worse for you—both of you. For I am goin' to kill yer both ; now, straight away, dead. I wanted to do it afore we left the brig, only t'others wouldn't let me. Now I've got my chance I'm not agoin' t' let it slip, I tell yer. So say yer prayers, if yer've got any ter say, an' look sharp. I shall count twenty, an' then bang ! and good-bye to the two of yer. With your own pistol, too—my, but that's a good un ! Yer'll be killed with yer own pistol." For the wretch held in his hand Wydale's own stolen revolver.

While Owen quickly but despairingly turned over in his mind all kinds of plans, and narrowly watched his enemy, seeking an unguarded moment in which he might rush upon him with some hope of success, the other went on :

"Yer said I killed t' boy, which were a lie, 'cos he killed hisself ; howsomdever, I mean t' pay yer out now by killin' t'other young varmint and yerself, too. I dessay, besides, ye've 'ad some hand in killin' my mate over there. There's been some hanky-panky business about it, and I 'spects you had a hand in it, so that's another good reason for my killin' on yer."

All that he said was interlarded with low, blasphemous oaths and vile slang, and Owen knew it was useless to answer him, or to attempt to bandy words with such a merciless wretch.

"Now, I'm goin' to begin ter count," Foster went on. And he began "One, two, three," and so on up to twelve, when he suddenly stopped. "No," he grinned, struck by a new idea in the way of fiendish cruelty, "I won't kill yer ; I shall just shoot yer in

the legs, so's you can't get away. Then you'll lie 'ere alongside my pal till that flyin' beast comes back and makes a meal of yer. That's a bully thought. Now then, 'ere goes. Right leg first—"

But, just then, something came whizzing through the air, and the next moment his arm was hanging useless from the shoulder, with a large arrow through it. The revolver was dropped with a shriek of pain from his grasp, and fell to the ground, and his watchful antagonist rushed in and picked it up. Foster found himself now covered, in his turn, by the pistol. But of this he seemed to take but little notice. His attention was too much taken up with his wounded arm and the pain it caused him. He sat down on a rock close by, and, amid a perfect volley of oaths and curses, made futile endeavours to withdraw the arrow, each effort calling forth a fresh howl of agony and renewed cursings.

Seeing that he was, for the time at least, reduced to harmlessness, Wydale looked round to learn where the friendly arrow had come from, but the gathering dusk had already begun to render the rocks around him indistinct. His glance, was, however, quickly guided by hearing a rattling and jangling, as of steel accoutrements, and, looking in the direction whence it came, he saw, advancing towards him, a strange figure indeed.

A man of gigantic stature had come down a side path from a rock above. From head to foot he was clad in shining armour, and upon his helmet was a plume of white feathers. In one hand he carried an enormous bow, in the other a long spear of unusual size and weight; and slung over one shoulder was a



"The next moment his arm was hanging useless from the shoulder, with
a large arrow through it." [p. 84.]

quiver filled with arrows. By his side was a great sword of a size proportionate to the other weapons, and to the wearer's powerful frame. He moved towards them with a long, easy stride, and behind him came three others of ordinary stature, clad also in suits of armour even more peculiar in appearance. These had no bows or quivers, but carried spears, swords, and shields. Beside them marched one who seemed to be shield-bearer to the first comer; he carried also—not without some apparent difficulty—another heavy spear, probably a spare one for his chief. The shield-bearer and some of the others had also lighted lanterns.

The newcomers marched onwards with military precision till within eight or nine yards, when they halted, and their leader addressed the astonished Wydale in English.

“I am glad to think, sir,” said the stranger, in a full, sonorous voice, and with an air of dignity, “that I have been of some assistance to you, and saved you from the tender mercies of this miscreant, who proclaimed, as I overheard from yonder rock, his intention to shoot you with your own pistol.”

This was spoken in clear, unmistakable English; the accent was perfect, so that no one could have doubted that the speaker was an Englishman. Yet there was a certain old-world air, a stateliness and gravity, both of tone and manner about him, and with it a bearing so majestic, that Wydale felt at once he was in the presence of no ordinary man. And, in his surprise, he scarce could find words in which to make reply.

Certainly, he had cause for wonderment. Here

was an apparition, a figure of a knight of the olden times, with sword and bow and spear, with waving plume and chivalrous mien—a figure, too, of such stature as is rarely seen nowadays—attended by retainers as strangely attired as himself, yet addressing him, in casual fashion, in plain, every-day English !

It is scarcely matter for surprise that Owen felt thoroughly bewildered. He hesitated and stammered : and seeing this, the other went on :

“It is growing dark, and it is not good to be abroad in this part in the darkness. If you will trust yourselves to my guidance, I will see you conducted to a safer place.”

Wydale roused himself at last to speak.

“Sir,” he now returned slowly, and almost unconsciously imitating the other’s gravity and old-world speech, and with instinctive respect, “if it was you who sent that arrow to its mark, we have, indeed, reason to be grateful, and your offer places us under a still further obligation. Since you have so clearly proved your friendliness to us, I shall have no hesitation in accepting your advice and proffered help. We know nothing of the country here, having only drifted in by chance on an abandoned vessel.”

The stranger nodded curtly, as if he quite understood or already knew the position of Wydale and his companion. Then he strode over to the wounded man, who had ceased his cursings and lamentation to listen and stare in astonishment as great as Owen had shown.

“You do not deserve mercy, for you would have shown none,” the stranger thus addressed him sternly ; “but I shall let you go this time ; beware, however,

how you conduct yourself in future. Let me see to your wound."

He handed his weapons to the shield-bearer, and, stepping up to the mate, examined his arm and deftly withdrew the arrow; not, however, without causing the sufferer to give vent to a howl of pain. Calling to his attendant in a tongue unknown to the others, he was handed a handkerchief or scarf, with which he bound up the arm in a manner that showed him to be well skilled in surgery.

"We may as well see what other stolen property the scoundrel has on him, before we let him go," the stranger observed to Wydale.

He turned to his men and spoke to them as before, in a foreign language; whereupon they went up to the man, and, despite his protests, made a careful search of him, the shield-bearer holding up a lantern to assist them. Then they went to the dead body and searched that also. What they found they handed to their chief, who passed them on to Wydale.

"This cartridge belt is mine," said Wydale, "and the other revolver and cartridge belt taken from the dead man belong to my friend. So also do this watch and chain." The last-mentioned articles had been found on Foster.

"Then take them," said the stranger briefly. And, turning to the mate, resumed, "Look you, sirrah! Take my advice and get back into that hole you were hiding in just now; you will be safe there for the night. In the morning you can go where you please; but remember, if you offend again, and you fall into my hands, I shall not let you off so easily. And now, friends," he added, turning to Wydale and his

companion, "let us be going. My people like not to trust themselves abroad here in the dark—nor would you, if you knew their reasons. They will give you the benefit of the lights; for myself, I know my way blindfolded."

He spoke with a grave yet easy courtesy; it was the courtly grace of a king wishing to put his guests thoroughly at their ease, yet, in doing so, to call forth in them a sentiment of homage and respect.

When he had finished speaking, he inclined his head and made way for them, and the two, returning the bow, followed the men with the lanterns.

They ascended a steep, winding path, and soon arrived at a broad ledge of rock that overlooked the scene of their encounter with the mate. Peering down, Owen thought he could dimly discern the man leaning against a rock and looking after them. And he could not help a passing feeling of pity for the wretch left thus, alone and wounded, in a strange place, exposed to unknown dangers; and near at hand was the dead body of the other upon whom had fallen some awful fate, the exact nature of which they did not even then understand.

Following his guides, he now saw before him, in the face of the perpendicular rock, a sort of gateway, within which could be seen the forms of men moving about with lights. These illuminated the opening with a glow that, mingled with a clanging and clashing of arms and armour, made the place appear a cheerful refuge from the darkness and loneliness of the silent plain below, with its deserted ruins and its hinted terrors.

When they entered, men, all in armour, as were

their guides, formed in two lines and saluted with respect; and immediately they were well inside, a great barred gate behind them clanged to with a bang and an obvious haste that somewhat surprised Wydale, and made him start.

The tall stranger looked round with the semblance of a smile.

"They like not to have these gates open at night," he said. "Indeed, it had fared ill with you, if I had not been here; for, though they heard and saw all, and would have been glad to help you, yet none would have ventured forth, either alone or in a crowd."

Wydale would fain have put many inquiries that rose in his mind, but there was that in the manner of their newly-found friend that seemed to forbid questioning him. He spoke only that which pleased him; such was the feeling he inspired.

So Owen held his peace, and patiently waited the other's pleasure.

They all now passed through other gates that closed behind them as had the first, and entered a spacious entrance hall, well lighted with hanging lamps, where were still more men. As these drew up in ranks, their chief took Wydale aside and questioned him.

"Where is your vessel?" he inquired.

Owen described the position as well as he was able, the other listening with a pre-occupied air, as though scarcely hearing. But at the end he nodded his head, and said:

"Yes, yes; in the bay, at the western point of the island. What size is she?"

"A brig, and her tonnage—"

"Aye, aye," the other interrupted, nodding again. "And you were the only ones left on board—you four—the others all deserted you?"

Wydale almost started. He did not remember to have told him how many had been left on board the vessel. However, he answered quietly:

"That is correct."

"I assume," his questioner went on, "from your venturing thus far unarmed into a strange country, that you had no arms. The runaways stole all there were available?"

"Yes."

"You had not even a pistol to bring with you on an exploration that might be full of danger?"

"None, sir, else you may be sure I should have brought it."

"Yes. And amongst the cargo, had you none you could have got at before venturing abroad?"

This query seemed to be put, Owen thought, with a shade of anxiety in the tone. But he could only shake his head.

"I saw all the cargo stowed," he declared, "and it belongs to my friend who is with me, to myself, and another, jointly. We unfortunately know only too well that there are no arms of any kind on board."

"Ah! well. Now I will show you a nearer way back to your vessel."

And, with that, he turned and motioned to those who had first been with him to accompany him. They caught up lanterns that were standing at hand and went on in front, their chief walking behind with Owen and his companion.

Thus they passed out of the great entrance chamber,

leaving behind them the armed men assembled there, and struck into a gallery that led off to the right. Here and there they came to other similar galleries, all of good height and width, and all brightly lighted with hanging lamps. They seemed to be well ventilated, too, and dry, for there was no trace of stagnant air or of damp.

After a long walk they suddenly emerged, through gates by which were other armed men on duty, into the open air, upon a hanging road or terrace that overlooked the sea. Here they caught sight of numbers of lights below, reflected in the water, and heard many subdued sounds and a distant hum as of a populous city not far away. But their guides waited not, and they were given no time to gain more than a passing glimpse here and there. Presently they turned again into an underground gallery in every way resembling those they had already traversed, and here they proceeded for a long distance, always in the same silence.

At last they came to a massive door, which was closed, and barred, and locked. And this, on being opened, gave entrance to an unlighted chamber, at the end of which was another ponderous door, which took some time to open. When, however, it swung back and they stepped outside, both the boy and Wydale uttered an exclamation of surprise; they could see at once that they stood on a ledge of rock overlooking the bay where lay the *Saucy Fan*.

By the aid of the lanterns they made their way down a rough path till they arrived in the centre of a dense mass of bushes, and here their conductor stopped.

"Take this lantern," said he. "With its aid you will see the way out. It will bring you to the shore, and the light will help you to find your way to your vessel and to get on board. To-morrow I will see you further. Now, good-night, and God-speed."

"Good-night, sir, and may heaven repay you for what you did for us to-day," Wydale answered gratefully.

"And, please, sir, may I thank you, too?" cried George impulsively; "and if you come to see us, we will all thank you, and my sister most of all, I know."

"Ah!" said the stranger, looking at the boy with kindly eyes, but in a half-dreamy fashion. "You have a sister here? Is her name Vanina?"

At this most unexpected and astonishing query both his hearers started in surprise. But he appeared not to notice it and turned, and, with a wave of the hand, seemed to dismiss them.

"May I ask a question?" Wydale begged of him. He had had much ado to make up his mind to the request, so curiously had the manner of the other impressed and awed him.

However, the stranger halted, and awaited the query.

"I only wished to ask," said Wydale, feeling very much confused—he knew not why—"whether you can tell me the name of the island—and—if you see no objection—your own name?"

"I am called Monella," was the answer, given in simple fashion and a quiet tone, "and this is the island of Atlantis. Good-night."

And so saying, the speaker turned and left them.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GAME OF BLUFF.

FOR the first morning in what appeared a cruelly-anxious time, the four on board the *Saucy Fan* rose and sat down to their early meal in something like good spirits. It is not too much to say that they were, in a sense, quite different people—such creatures are we of the circumstances of the hour. The account brought back by Wydale and George of their adventures had changed all their thoughts, and fears, and hopes, and expectations, and directed their ideas into new and most unexpected channels. It was now clear that the island was inhabited, and by what appeared to be a friendly and a white race, one of whom, at least—and he evidently a man of mark—spoke English. From him and his followers it was clear they might look for honest treatment, and probably, if need were, for protection; for had he not already aided them in a most critical emergency? Moreover, though armed himself with only bow and arrows, he had scrupulously handed over to Wydale the revolver found upon the dead man, although he must have known its value. This went to show that they stood in no danger of having the ship plundered by the inhabitants. Their minds thus set at ease, they could now give them to the pleasurable excitement of an-

ticipation and speculation as to the strange experiences that awaited them in their intercourse with this unknown, old-world people.

All sorts of incidents were conceivable in circumstances so unusual. Vanina and her brother indulged in almost every kind of surmise; the latter especially was full of irrepressible excitement. Wydale was, in fact, the only one of the four who did not altogether share in the elation of the others. The memory of the dead man's face, of the unaccountable horror—even terror—that had seized upon him the previous day, and his vague recollection of the terrible shape he had seen rise into the air from its horrible repast, and fly away with the departing mist—the memory of all this had by no means left him. Indeed it had haunted him throughout the night, and thrust itself into the foreground, even to the partial exclusion of what had happened since. He could not prevent his thoughts from dwelling on it nor help speculating upon the mystery of the deserted city. That the gruesome tragedy he had witnessed and the unknown horror had something to do with it he felt convinced. If so, the terror it inspired must indeed be great to cause a whole people to forsake their ancient city, and their gardens, and their pastures.

Then the crew of the brig. They might yet give trouble, for they would be desperate, and they were armed with rifles. Against those the two revolvers and the few cartridges he had recovered could do but little.

But, if he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon these doubtful points, he did so only as the prudent soldier calmly weighs and calculates the odds against him,

but without permitting them to daunt him. Indeed, the spice of danger and adventure he foresaw was in itself a strong attraction, and how great that danger could be he already knew.

After the breakfast they discussed the programme for the day. Vanina wished to go ashore. She longed, she said, for a walk on the sands and under the trees, and was tired of being stived up on the vessel. But Wydale was opposed to it.

"You forget," he said, "that those scoundrels who deserted this vessel and left us to die—murderers they are, in intention, every one, skipper, mate, and all—are lurking in the neighbourhood. They have firearms—your own rifle, Dareville, among others—and are a desperate, utterly unscrupulous gang. One of them, at least—Foster—knows we are here, and will tell the others. Then think what a temptation the vessel and her cargo will hold out to them. Why, they would murder us all merely to get at the whisky to get drunk on. My advice is to stick to the ship to-day, until our friend of last night comes to visit us, as he promised. Then I hope things may assume a different aspect."

This advice was so well-judged that Sydney at once accepted it.

"Wydale is right," he said; "you had better defer your visit to the shore, Vanina. Confound those rascals; for the moment I had forgotten they were about."

"It's altogether an uncanny place, apparently," observed Vanina, with a little shudder, and in a disappointed tone. "Strange monsters about, both in the sea and on the shore. And, as though that were

not enough, you must needs threaten us again with that hateful gang I thought we were well rid of. I declare you've chased away all the glowing expectations I had formed, and brought us back to the period of 'excursions and alarms!'"

Wydale, to—or rather at—whom this speech was more particularly directed, laughed good-naturedly.

"I am sorry to seem to pose as a wet blanket," he assured her. "It's all for your good, you know, as mothers say to children; and it is, I hope, only for one day. After to-day, I trust there will be no further cause to place any restraint upon your liberty. Your word shall be our law, even as though you were captain of the brig."

"Or Queen Boadicea," George put in slyly.

"Nay, someone more up-to-date, I hope," said she, the smile returning to her face.

"Well—say—ah! What do you say to Queen of Atlantis? Shall we dub you, Vanina, Queen of Atlantis?" George suggested.

And at this conceit he clapped his hands, and boisterously expressed approval; then, lifting his sister's hand, he bowed over it and raised it to his lips.

"Thus does thy brother salute his sister and his Queen," he said, with mock solemnity. "N.B.—I got that out of 'The Pirate of the Gory Main,' that I was reading this morning before breakfast."

For answer he received a box on the ears, and an admonition to be more respectful to his sister than to mix her up with his "penny-dreadful-blood-and-thunder tales." Then he ran off to fish over the vessel's side. His sister followed him on deck, where,

under the awning, she sat down to read a favourite book.

Wydale and Dareville sat a little apart cleaning and examining their revolvers, and counting up their cartridges. Of these there were, unfortunately, very few, and Sydney regarded them distressfully.

"We'll have to save these up," he remarked, ruefully, "for emergencies. Each cartridge here may prove worth its weight in gold."

"More," commented Wydale, tersely. "Each may save a life."

"Yes. And for that reason, even if the skipper and his following should come down on us, we must try to bluff 'em, somehow. A shot or two well aimed and timed may do a lot amongst a cowardly set like that."

"I have been thinking," resumed Wydale, "whether it is prudent to keep the vessel so near the shore. Wouldn't it be wiser to get her further out?"

"I don't see that it can make much difference. They're pretty sure to come in the boats. However, a soldier should never neglect a chance, and they *might* come by land over the ridge and pop at us from behind those trees. So, suppose we slip the shore line and let her drift free. With this bit of breeze she'll swing out away from the shore."

This was soon done, the raft was hauled on board, and the brig slowly drifted farther out.

This had the effect of disarranging George's fishing lines, and he complained loudly when he pulled them up and found them in an inextricable tangle. But suddenly he ceased his lamentations, and stared at something in the distance.

"I say, what's that?"

Sydney took up a pair of glasses and looked. Then he put them quietly down.

"It's a boat," he said. "You two must go below. We are likely to have trouble."

Vanina stoutly protested, but was forced to yield, and retired with her brother to the cabin.

In consequence of the change in her position, the brig was now lying end on to the advancing boat.

"That may enable us to bring our cannon into play, if need be," Sydney observed. "Now don't let them come too near; and, if we have to shoot in earnest, I'll take the skipper and you the mate."

Wydale nodded, and no more was said. The two lounged over the bows and watched the boat—there was only one—through their glasses, waiting quietly till it should be near enough to hail. They could already make out the skipper, but Foster was not to be seen.

"That's near enough," said Dareville, presently. "Now, a hail and a command to stop, and I fire a shot across her bows, if she still comes on. Next shot I aim at the skipper. That's the programme, I take it."

Those in the boat took no notice of the hail; but when a bullet came splashing through the water alongside, sending quite a little shower of spray on board, they stopped at once, apparently in great surprise.

"Perhaps," suggested Wydale, "the mate hasn't yet got back, and their appearance here is accidental. If so, they don't know where these pistols came from, or what arms and ammunition we may have. You see Foster's not there."

"I fancy you're right. If so, we'll bluff 'em, if we play our cards with judgment."

Then Durford, the skipper, stood up and shouted something that they failed to catch. However, its purport must have been deemed satisfactory by the speaker, for he sat down, and the boat, which had drifted round broadside on, began to move again.

"One for the gunwale this time, as a warning," Sydney muttered. "The next for his skippership in right earnest." And he fired.

The skipper, who had one hand on the gunwale and the other on the tiller, pulled the former hastily away, as a bullet crashed into the wood just alongside of it. They stopped rowing again, and seemed to be consulting.

"If we only had a good supply of cartridges, I would hurry up the rascals," Sydney grunted, discontentedly. "But we can't afford to throw a single shot away."

Durford again stood up. He made signs to those on the brig, pointed to the shore, and pulled out a white handkerchief. Then the boat was rowed towards the shore and grounded on the sand. Durford landed and walked alone along the shore to the nearest point that faced the brig, all the time busily waving the white handkerchief as a flag of truce.

"I've a good mind to kill him as he stands, flag of truce or no flag of truce," Sydney muttered through his teeth. "The murdering hound! It makes my blood boil to see him impudently standing there trusting to *our* honour, after the way he's treated us.

However, as he's come for a parley, I suppose we must let him have his way."

"Brig ahoy!" now came from the skipper.

"On shore there, ahoy!" shouted back Dareville.
"Who are you?"

This very unexpected question seemed to disconcert the flag-of-truce man, for he hesitated, and looked at the brig uneasily. After a pause, he began again; and the following colloquy ensued.

"Brig ahoy! Is that Mr. Dareville?"

"Shore ahoy! It is. Who are you, and what do want?"

"Oh, come, sir; you know me well enough. I am Joseph Durford, captain of the *Saucy Fan*."

"I know no Joseph Durford, captain of the *Saucy Fan*. I know a Joseph Durford, pirate, who abandoned his water-tight vessel in a calm; I know Joseph Durford, the rascally thief who stole our gold watches and rifles and revolvers, and I know Joseph Durford the would-be murderer of ladies and boys, who drugged our coffee and battened down the hatches, and left us to die in the Sargasso Sea; and whom I will lay by the heels and send to penal servitude, if I can catch him!"

Dareville said all this quite calmly, without the least show of temper. But it stung the other into a fury.

"It's all a lie!" he shouted, with an awful oath. "I never stole yer—watches; I've got a chronometer of my own, better'n both yours put together. If others stole 'em, I didn't. And, as to the rest, you was forgotten in the hurry—I thought you was in the other boat. One of 'em's lost."

"That will do. You may save your soul the sin of any further lies. So that's the fancy tale you had concocted, is it? Well, be off! You've no business here! If you or any of you attempt to come on board, we will shoot you down like the dogs you are."

"As to shootin', two can play at that game," retorted Durford, darting glances of hate from under his scowling brows. "An,' when the odds is about five to one, the largest number generally gets the best of it in the end. Anyhow, I am skipper of the *Saucy Fan*, and I am agoin' to take command of her. And, Mr. Dareville, you've alluded to a lady on board, your sister. I advise yer, for yer own sake and hers, not to get my men's blood up; yer don't know what men may do in the heat of—"

"Be off, you hound! I've had enough of this!" Dareville interrupted. "I have taken possession of the *Saucy Fan* in the name of the owners, with whom I am a partner. Even on your own showing, you abandoned the brig—and we've salved her. I've appointed myself skipper; and you've no further business here. Your very presence is an insult. Sheer off! or I will put a bullet through you!"

"Then it's war to the knife, is it? You will regret this when it's too late, Mr. Dareville."

"We're not afraid of you," Dareville returned, contemptuously. "Now, see here! When you appeared in your, or I should say, *my* boat—for it has been stolen from the brig—you interrupted a little pistol practice I was enjoying. I want to go on with it; but you've got your foot on the pebble I was taking for a target. Would you mind moving your

foot—thanks!” and a bullet from his revolver struck the very pebble Durford had been standing on, just when he raised his foot.

Evidently the feat impressed him. But he moved away slowly, shaking his fist.

Dareville laughed. “I was sorry to waste the bullet,” he said to Wydale; “but am in hopes the hint may not be lost on him; and it may save some lives.”

“A good hint, too. I can see that you can shoot. Ah! What a pity to be here without more ammunition.”

“Yes; and the question now is, what arms and ammunition have *they* got,” responded Sydney, watching the boat somewhat anxiously through his glasses. “If it comes to a long fight, they’ll soon wear out our slender stock.”

Durford had regained the boat in a towering rage, for he was gesticulating violently. The craft was pushed off, and once more headed for the brig.

“He seems to mean business this time.” Dareville set his teeth while he was speaking. “Mind! Leave Durford to me! I’ll give him what he deserves. But look out that they don’t pot you.”

The boat came on, but in a desultory fashion, as could be seen. Men would pull, and then stop to look round apprehensively, when a loud oath and threat from the skipper—audible even to those on the brig—would start them rowing again.

Suddenly they stopped rowing altogether, and looked and pointed eagerly at something on the other side of the vessel. Some even stood up to look over

the others, regardless of how they exposed themselves to the pistols of their antagonists.

"What are they looking at?" Sydney asked, suspicious of some ruse. "Look round and see. I'm not going to take my eye off that villain."

Wydale looked, and uttered an exclamation.

"It's a boat—several boats—a whole fleet of boats coming round the point!" he cried. "It must be our friend of last night."

It was as he said, a whole fleet of boats; and now that those on board of them had caught sight of the brig, they raised a hearty shout and blew loud blasts on horns and trumpets.

In his turn Wydale could not help shouting, "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

This brought George and his sister up on deck. At sight of the flotilla they joined in the cheer. It was heard on the strangers' boats, and immediately responded to by another outburst; while George actually danced round the deck in his excitement.

As for Durford and his crew, they evidently mistrusted the strange craft, for they turned their boat round and rowed away.

CHAPTER IX.

“QUEEN OF ATLANTIS!”

THE four on the deck of the *Saucy Fan* watched with ever-increasing wonder the advancing fleet, as more and more vessels kept appearing round the point, and those on board of them added their cheers and trumpet-blasts to the general clamour. And now that the first were nearer, and could be more clearly viewed, the spectators were altogether amazed at the richness of their mountings and the gorgeousness of the whole display. Every vessel had sails as well as banks of rowers. But the sails seemed intended rather for ornament than for use. They were of some material that glistened like silver, and on them were worked strange devices in brilliant colours. All were square sails, hung much as lug sails would be, and altogether appeared to partake of the character of banners. Certainly the vessels depended more for their means of propulsion upon their banks of rowers than upon these gorgeous sails; for they moved with the precision of machines, and appeared to be as completely under control as the engines of a steam launch.

The foremost vessels passed the brig for some distance, and then swept round towards the shore in a curve; behind them came five larger vessels—great State barges one might guess them—with one still



Thus the *Saucy Fan* was in the centre of a glittering half-circle of the strange craft. [p. 105.]

larger and more superbly decorated in the centre. This vessel was the most richly fitted up and ornamented of all the imposing array. Its sides seemed to be of ivory, with a band of delicate turquoise blue running from stem to stern. In and out ran designs in gold and silver. The oars that appeared at the sides below the deck were gold-mounted, and the blades appeared to be of polished silver, and flashed in the sun each time they left the water. The bow was shaped like the head, neck, and fore-part of the body of a stork or crane, with open mouth and outspread wings, the neck and head shooting high into the air.

A silver-spangled awning was swung above the deck, and upon the two masts that, like the oars, seemed to be worked in gold, hung banners or sails of wondrous workmanship, the silver sheen of the general groundwork dazzling the eyes as it caught and mirrored back the sunshine.

On the decks of the smaller craft were rows of men clad in polished armour, and armed with flashing spears and shields. And on the raised decks at stem and stern of the larger ones were officers in the most brilliant and varied suits of armour that perhaps have ever been seen ; so, at least, thought those on the *Saucy Fan*, looking through their glasses at the different vessels, as each in turn came clearly into view.

When the five central vessels had arrived opposite the brig, the whole line stopped, and those behind them grouped themselves off the shore. Thus the *Saucy Fan* was in the centre of a glittering half-circle of the strange craft, all beautiful vessels as to

design and decoration, yet small compared with the brig.

Then all remained motionless, while everyone on board sent up a deafening shout, the soldiers and their leaders lifting their swords and shields and other weapons again and again in the air, saluting.

"What on earth is it all about?" said at last the puzzled Sydney. "What a pity we didn't know they were coming. We'd have had the Union Jack flying, and we could have dipped it in proper style, you know."

"Couldn't we fire off the cannon?" suggested George. "There's only powder in it."

"A good idea, Georgy," Wydale answered, "but powder here is too precious to waste. No; all we can do, I'm afraid, is to shout back our loudest."

"If we could only get at some of the fireworks that are down in the hold, and let them off," sighed George. "That would fetch 'em."

And now from the principal barge a boat was seen putting off. In it were, besides the rowers, figures all clad in armour. One, a giant in stature, wore a coat of mail, with a white tunic underneath. George pointed him out to Sydney and his sister.

"That," he said, "is the one we saw last night; the man who called himself Monella."

Seeing their intention of coming on board, Wydale and Dareville hastened to the gangway, and replaced the ladder which they had hoisted in, in anticipation of the attack from the crew.

The ladder having been lowered, the commanding figure of Monella came over the side, followed by four others. A minute later the five new-comers stood

in a semi-circle around the deck facing the other four.

A short pause ensued while the one group gazed upon the other, surprise and interest roused on both sides. And seldom, perhaps, in the history of the world—outside the realms of pantomime and comic opera—had there been seen a more extraordinary contrast.

The principal figure, towering head and shoulders above the others, was clad in a suit of mail—chain armour, all of gold. Beneath, was a white satin tunic, also embroidered with gold, precious stones being sewn or otherwise attached to it in such manner as to imitate the forms of birds. A white cloak with a scarlet lining hung from his shoulders, and round his left arm was a jewelled band as of some order or decoration, the centre being a diamond of extraordinary size and brilliancy. Upon his head was a helmet of gold, inlaid with silver, and by his side was a sword such as some could scarce have wielded even with both hands. So much for his dress. His face and figure were still more striking. Though his hair and full beard were iron grey, he showed no other signs of age. His figure was well-formed, supple, and muscular as that of a well-built man of thirty, and the perfect mould of the features intimated that as a youth he must have been handsome and well-favoured far above the average of mankind. The face was still supremely handsome, and one that attracted and retained the notice of all who looked upon it. But its greatest charm lay in its changing expressions and the penetrating glance of the steady, grey eyes. These seemed to be gifted with the faculty of charming or

over-awing those upon whom they fell, according as they softened in tenderness, sympathy, or affection, or flashed in anger or contempt. But, whether they looked forth in stern rebuke, or in pitying interest, or lighted up with the fire of unflinching courage and high resolve, there was ever a touch of human sympathy that aroused and held the respect, trustfulness, and devotion of all around him. To these attributes—only seen now and then in the world, and never save in those born to rule their fellow-men—were added a graceful ease and nobility, even majesty of bearing, that of itself commanded homage.

Of those with him, three were in armour richly chased or damascened; while the fourth was habited in a coat of mail similar to Monella's, set off with an embroidered sash. All carried swords and daggers with jewelled hilts; but the last one's arms were of lighter make than the others. Opposed to these were the four in homely English garb of travel; certainly presenting as odd a contrast as can be well imagined.

Wydale advanced and warmly greeted the friend who had so opportunely come to his aid the previous evening, and Monella, in turn, spoke a few words of welcome to him and his friends, assuring them that the display of armed men in the vessels around was to be taken in a complimentary and not a hostile sense. A few minutes later, when he had become known to Vanina and Sydney Dareville, and had, in return, indicated the names of those with him, he, to Wydale's surprise, asked for a few words in private with "the maiden"—as in his old-world speech he designated Vanina—and her brother. As a consequence the three disappeared into the cabin, leaving Wydale

and the lad on deck, confronted by the four strangers.

Of these, the one who wore the suit of mail now advanced and offered his hand. He was a man of perhaps forty-five years of age, with a clean-shaven face, good-natured in expression, and a figure that was inclined to stoutness.

“My name is Dr. Manleth,” he began. “I am an Englishman, and am glad to welcome you and your friends on my own account.”

And he shook hands with George.

“You look puzzled,” he went on, with a smile, “and I don’t wonder. I have been here five years, so am used to the place. But, when we first landed here—Monella and myself—it was more astonishing than I can well convey to you; especially as we, of course, did not then know the language; and it took a long time to understand it all.”

“And how did you get here?” Owen asked.

“Shipwrecked; drifted here in an open boat; two others who were in the boat with us died of exposure and hunger and thirst. We were both nearly dead, too, when we got here. But they treated us well—handsomely, in fact—and Monella soon became their recognised leader—sort of Prime Minister, Commander-in-Chief, and Archbishop, all in one. He is a wonderful man.”

“But why all these soldiers? Whom is there to fight against? One would think you were at war with all the—”

“So we are; and very much at war, too, unfortunately. It has gone badly with us lately. But we

managed as well as we could, and waited patiently, hoping that you were coming."

"That *we* were coming!" Wydale repeated, feeling bewildered. "How in the world could you guess that we were coming? And what help can *we* be to you? We have no firearms, I am sorry to say."

"So I hear; and, of course, we are sorry, too; and disappointed. But Monella seems in good heart about it, and that is everything, though I do not know what is in his mind. They all trust to him blindly, like a lot of children, sheep I had almost said. They are kindly, docile, well-disposed people, but haven't spirit. He's tried his best to infuse some of his own lion courage into them, but they have hitherto remained listless and wanting in enthusiasm; while against us we have a horde of ruthless foes who are perfect devils for fighting and cruelty of all kinds. Hence, you see, Monella has been sadly handicapped, and any other man would have despaired. But that is a word unknown to him, I fancy. However, I hope we shall get on better now you have come. So we have all been hoping."

"*We*?" Wydale again asked in wonder. "What have *we* to do with it?"

"Hush! Here they come. Now we shall soon know whether the prophecies are to be fulfilled."

Vanina came first out of the cabin, followed by Dareville and Monella. She looked flushed, and her eyes were unusually bright.

Her whole manner and bearing, too, had changed—so Wydale thought, feeling each moment more surprised at her glowing face and sparkling eyes. Then he glanced at Dareville, and read there, too,

signs that surprised and puzzled him. But no time was given him for speculation.

Monella stepped up beside Vanina, and addressed her.

“Let me now present to you, more formally, these gentlemen, some of the chief officers of State. This is the Lord Kandlar, High Chamberlain; this is the Lord Ombrian, the Admiral of our Fleet; this the Lord Selion, State Treasurer; and last, but not least, here is my good friend, Dr. Manleth, a scientist of no mean attainments and a good and worthy English gentleman. If I do not name him amongst our lords, it is from his own choice. He could be so ranked, if he chose, but has declined; he holds that a scientist should not seek worldly honours.”

“Also,” good-humouredly said Manleth, “a doctor cannot well be much of a fighting man. There must be someone to attend the wounded—and there have been many lately, you must know.”

“Ah, yes,” confirmed Monella. “And well it is for them that they have one like our friend here to tend them. And now, will you come on board our State barge?”

“What are you going to do with this vessel?” Vanina asked.

“We shall tow her with us to our harbour and docks.”

“Then,” said Vanina, looking round, as Wydale, who was watching her, thought, with a sort of triumph, “let me stay on board and go with her. I will not desert the *Saucy Fan* for another vessel to make my entry amongst your people—no! not though that other vessel were the richest and grandest in the world.”

"Be it so," replied Monella, inclining his head, as in approval. "I will now give the necessary orders."

He went over the side and spoke in a strange language to those remaining in the boat in which they'd come. These rowed at once to the brilliant barge and communicated their message to those on board, then hastened round to other vessels in turn. Then there was again much shouting and blowing of trumpets, and anon the barge moved round, and three of the larger vessels with rowers came near to take the brig in tow. The boat then came back, bringing six or eight native sailors—even these, Wydale noticed, were partly dressed in light armour—and under Monella's direction they manned the capstan and weighed anchor. Soon the *Saucy Fan* was once more on her way, moving majestically through the water in tow of a string of the native war vessels, amongst which she towered like a man-of-war amongst merchant craft.

The State barge came on behind her, and the remainder of the fleet fell into line, three abreast, some in front and some in the rear.

And, while they thus proceeded across the bay, from time to time mighty shouts went up from one end of the line of vessels to the other. And to Owen it seemed as though he could distinguish the word "Vanina."

"What is it they are saying?" he presently asked the doctor, who was standing beside him.

"They are shouting," the other made answer, "Hail, Vanina! Queen of Atlantis!"

CHAPTER X.

"A LAND OF STRANGE ROMANCE!"

BEFORE Wydale could frame a reply or a further query in response to the astonishing statement of the doctor, the latter had moved away to speak to someone else. Thus left to himself, Wydale leaned over the taffrail, and gazed out on the scene before him with the air of a man too utterly bewildered to be quite sure whether what he sees is real, or only part of a fantastic dream. So, at least, he felt himself; and he had met with so many surprises in the last forty-eight hours, that he was now prepared for almost any unparalleled developments. Everything about him began to wear an air of unreality. Even his friends were changed; the very expressions of their faces were changed—so Owen thought—as they stood and talked with Monella and others around them.

Slowly the long array passed out of the bay, and began to round the point at the south-west end, and then there gradually unfolded itself before them another scene as unexpected as it was striking.

The coast-line ran off to the left—a long wall of high, precipitous, glistening rock, with three hanging terraces constructed one above the other on the face of the cliff. At intervals in these were small towers,

and the roadways were screened off by battlements and loop-holed walls. Opposite to this coast-line, that is to say, to the right, and about half a mile away, another island rose out of this silent sea, looking, as it gleamed and sparkled in the sunlight through a slight haze, rather like a fairy creation than solid fact.

This second island rose steeply from the water, and upon it stood a mighty castle built of the crystal rock. In size, in height, it was colossal, and in design it displayed a massive grandeur that exceeded in effect anything Wydale had ever before beheld. Beyond it could be seen an extensive city, rising tier above tier in the background, with towers and minarets so lofty that they seemed to melt into the air above.

While Wydale was gazing in admiration upon this scene, the doctor returned to his side.

"That," he said, "is Dilandis, or 'New Atlantis,' though itself, I imagine, pretty old; and the island on which it is built is called Dilanda. The ancient city is situated in the other island, on the further side of those cliffs to the left."

Wydale nodded.

"Aye," he said, "I have seen the ruins. But tell me, why is it deserted? And why do you all go about thus in armour?"

"Your first question requires rather a lengthy answer," replied Manleth, "and I must leave it for another occasion, or for someone else, for, indeed, I am not quite sure that I rightly understand it yet myself. But, as to the second query, the matter is unfortunately all too simple. We are liable at any moment to attacks from our enemies. I say 'we,'

because both Monella and myself have for some years thoroughly identified ourselves with the people here, who have been good friends to us. Their foes, the ‘Karanites,’ as they are called—from the name of their King, ‘Kara’—are adepts with the bow and arrow, the sword, and the spear; hence you see that, in the absence of firearms, armour becomes a matter of necessity. All the armour which you see here is of very ancient make; they have quantities stored away. It remained unused, yet carefully preserved, for centuries; for this warfare is a comparatively recent trouble.”

“I see. It all seems very strange—a little world in which one has to go back to antiquated modes of warfare. It seems like a dream, an impossibility in the nineteenth century.”

“Ah, yes; it appeared so to us when we first came here. But we have grown accustomed to it, as you will after a time. I expect they will want you to join their ranks; and they will fit you out in a suit like all the rest. We had hoped you would have had some firearms with you in your vessel; that would have very quickly brought the war to an end. But we must now still struggle on as best we can without.”

“That reminds me,” observed Wydale, “you said that you expected us, and spoke of prophecies and other enigmatical outpourings. What does it all mean?”

Dr. Manleth gave a gesture of impatience.

“I’m sure I can’t explain. I do not understand myself,” he said. “We live here in a half-real world, the rest is myth and superstition. Everything is more or less enshrouded in mystery, and though I

have been here some years, there is much I cannot fathom. For instance, they insist that they were driven out of the old city by a race of vampires."

"A race of vampires! What does that mean?"

"They say that in the interior of the main island there are terrible, uncouth flying monsters. They call them 'Kralens,' which, in their language, signifies vampires, and declare that they not only attack and devour human beings, but have the power of fascinating them—holding them, as by a spell, before their own approach, thus preventing the victims from escaping. As a scientist one of course deems such a tale a myth."

"Have you encountered them?" Wydale asked.

"No. Our rulers won't let one venture there. But I have managed to slip through the guards once or twice, and have wandered about in the ruined city and its vicinity without seeing anything worse than my own shadow."

"But I have seen something more—only yesterday. I have seen—dimly through the mist—a monstrous flying creature which I can't describe; and I have seen its victim," and here he shuddered, "and I was almost stifled with an odour so supremely loathsome as to confuse your senses, and make you sick and dizzy, and unable to move, and to fill you with a deadly horror. I have such a vivid recollection of it that it will remain always rooted in my memory."

"You—you declare this to be true?"

"I do; solemnly. Upon my honour."

The doctor paused and ruminated for a while. Then said:

"It is very strange; but this is a marvellous land

in which one scarce knows how much to believe and how much not. As to this monster's so-called fascinating power, I have a theory about it which you shall have another time."

"And your friend Monella; what does he say about it all?"

Manleth hesitated.

"Well," he said, "between ourselves, Monella is himself a living mystery. I met him first on ship-board when we were both 'homeward bound' on our way to England. At least, *I* was; he was on his way to South America. I have lived with him for five years, yet I know, in one sense, no more of him than I did at the end of the first week. I know not what countryman he is; he seems to speak every language known and unknown—and certainly one or two that must be almost pre-historic, I should think. When we arrived here he picked up the language with such ease that it seemed rather like recovering a once familiar tongue than learning one he had never heard. He appears to have been everywhere, to have done everything. Not that he is any boaster; far from it. This I do know—he is a right good fellow, a loyal friend, and an upright man, with a kindly, sympathetic nature; hard as nails, strong as a Hercules, bold as a lion, a wonderful fighter and leader, full of energy, of resource, of sound judgment and prevision. So much for the practical side of his very complex nature. For, with all that, he is a dreamer—'a dreamer of dreams,' and a believer in dreams. A man with an unwavering belief in his own destiny that nothing can displace. He faces every danger with such reckless courage that we

often remonstrate with him ; but for answer he will merely smile and say, ' It is not my destiny to perish here,' or words to that effect."

" A strange man, from your description. Yet I can well believe all you say. I *felt* it, somehow, the first time we met."

" It is so with everyone ; but his effect on all is not the same. Most love him, but some there are who fear and hate him. But all their dislike, and all they try to do, avails naught against him. He merely thrusts it aside disdainfully, and goes serenely on his way, like a man who brushes away a cobweb from his face."

" Have other people ever come here besides you two ? "

" I have heard so, but cannot tell you much about them. But it is certain that many years ago a priest drifted here with some companions. They are all dead long ago, but they converted a portion of the islanders, and that's what all the row's about. It caused a split and a civil war, for the other section are idolaters. Their leaders are believed to be magicians. 'Tis an inexplicable land, in fact ; a land of milk and honey, of practical, industrious people, and yet, withal, a land of dreams and fancies."

" Why do not more come here ? Why is the very existence of the place unknown to the outer world ? "

" That also is a puzzle ; but it would appear that there are deep channels in the rocky shoals by which we are surrounded which, though they have under-currents, are, on the surface, normally choked with the weed. At rare intervals, however, owing to some

unusual combination of wind and tide and outside currents, strong surface flows set in along the channels, forcing aside the weed, and so making a clear waterway, that traverses all our inside seas, and finally finds a way out to the ocean on the other side. On such occasions the channels are free to navigation, and they remain so for a few days—seldom for more than a week. This may happen once or twice in a short time—a few years—and then it may not occur again for a century. So they say; I cannot tell you more.”

“Then our chance of ever getting away is doubtful?” remarked Wydale ruefully. “Is that so?”

“I am sorry to say it is. But they have astrologers here—”

“Astrologers?”

“Yes; and they are said often to be able to foretell the time—at least, approximately. Certainly they predicted your arrival about this time, and, further, that your coming amongst us would bring victory and peace and happiness to the land for ever after.”

“No wonder they have given us such a welcome, then, and shown such readiness to make the lady a queen,” laughed Wydale. “But I’m afraid they will be very much disappointed. If we had firearms, it would be another matter. As it is, we are but a broken reed to lean upon. The question is, will they in their disappointment turn and rend us?”

“I trust not—I think not, from what I know of them. And they believe, too, firmly in Monella, and he, I know, will be a firm friend to all of us.”

“Dreamer though he is?”

“Dreamer though he is,” returned the doctor, laughingly. “But you will find that as a fighter—in warfare—he is no dreamer, but very practical indeed. It’s fortunate he isn’t on the other side.”

Then Wydale entered into a brief relation of the adventures of himself and his friends. But soon the talk was interrupted, for they were getting near the fortress, and Owen found his attention taken up by all that he now saw.

Many small boats had come out to meet them, and their occupants, first adding their ringing cheers to those of the fleet, drifted past and fell in astern. And now Wydale perceived two lofty towers connected by a bridge high in air, with ramparts on the outer side, and beneath, great water-gates giving access to an extensive harbour. Through these gates, and through others again, the *Saucy Fan* moved slowly on, on all sides being seen fluttering flags, and people all waving handkerchiefs, scarves, or banners, and joining in the shouts of welcome. The masts of the brig went easily under the aerial bridges, and soon she was floating in the waters of the inner harbour, which was now crowded with boats of all kinds decorated in a hundred curious fashions. Here, while the vessel was being brought to a standstill, Monella and Dareville, who had been making their preparations, put a match to the carrounade, and the loud explosion that ensued went booming across the water, repeated again and again from the rocks and walls like the thunder’s roar, and dying away at last in a sullen growl.

At once a dead silence fell upon the crowd. They

seemed stupefied, and gazed at one another in astonishment and alarm.

But Monella lifted his arms and addressed them in some words that Wydale could not understand, at the same time taking Vanina by the hand, as though to introduce her to the populace. Then the cheers rang out again still louder, and amidst them the brig was brought alongside a quay, and soon all was in readiness for landing.

“That was a good idea firing the little cannon,” observed the doctor. “It will impress them. I heard you had a little powder; how much is there?”

“Only one small keg. It won’t go very far even in royal salutes;” and Wydale shook his head.

“We must see whether we can’t make some more,” said Manleth cheerfully. “I am a chemist, and, with a sample to start with, I am not sure we could not manage it.”

“Heaven send you may. From all I can understand it would be almost worth its weight in gold.”

“More,” said the doctor tersely. “They have more gold here than they know what to do with.”

CHAPTER XI.

PRINCESS IDELIA.

THE party landed, and proceeded through the city, passing now through tastefully laid-out gardens, with glowing flowers, shady bowers, and cool, plashing fountains, and now through wide streets of noble buildings, making their way ever upwards towards a stately palace that occupied the highest point on this part of the island. As they mounted broad flights of steps that led from one terraced garden to another, views could be obtained stretching far over the interior of the island. Wydale saw that, as in the larger island, the interior formed a sort of basin, or crater, shut in from the sea by precipitous cliffs, but here and everywhere were signs of cultivation and successful agriculture. Fields, meadows, parks, and groves, running streams and small lakes, were everywhere to be seen, with browsing cattle scattered amongst them. Overhead flew great flocks of birds, and the lakes and streams were full of water-fowl. Most noticeable of all were numbers of cranes that were to be seen on every hand, flying overhead, or walking in their solemn fashion, like dainty ladies, picking their way through the streets and gardens. Evidently they were privileged birds.

“What are all these cranes doing here?” Wydale

asked the doctor, as they walked together behind the rest.

"They are tamed and trained to look after the other birds," was the reply. "And wonderfully they do it, too, as you will see another day. They are also good companions when you make friends with them. I have a couple that will follow me anywhere, if I but call them ; and they are just as companionable here as dogs elsewhere. They will fish for you, catch the other birds for you, carry messages, and make themselves useful in a number of ways."

"And why is the other island so deserted, and this so thickly populated?"

"I have already stated that the people are said to have been driven away by certain terrible monsters, real or fancied. It is believed that these creatures, whatever they are, cannot fly high enough to pass over the cliffs that everywhere shut in the interior of the larger island. Therefore here—in fact anywhere outside—you are safe from them."

"But you have other gruesome monsters outside—gigantic cuttle-fish, to wit."

"Ah, you have heard of them?"

"Yes ; more than that. We were attacked by them ; that was our first welcome to the place."

"H'm ; now that is odd ! I know they are there, because our fishing-boats have abandoned that bay for no other cause. That is why you saw no signs of us when you arrived. The people will not venture there, for several boats have been attacked, and poor fellows dragged out of them and carried off. Yet when I and others have gone out to hunt for the cuttles, they never could be seen. From descriptions

given to me, I think they are enormous calamaries. Only two known of exist, and, if we could capture them, we should do a good turn to our fisher folk."

"And where are we going now?" Wydale presently inquired.

"To the royal palace, which is also the royal observatory, where are the astrologers who watch the stars through telescopes, the size of which will astonish you."

"Ah, that reminds me; there are telescopes, as well as opera and field-glasses, among the cargo in our boat. I was thinking they would surprise the natives hereabouts."

"The glasses, yes; but telescopes, no. However, you will see later for yourself."

"And what are we to do at the 'royal palace'? and who lives there?"

"We are going to see the Princess Idelia; and, later, the grand old High Priest and Astrologer-Royal, Gralda, a seer said to be as old as Methuselah. You will like the Princess; she is a charming lady. But don't lose your heart to her, for she is engaged to Prince Rokta, whom we shall also probably see. She speaks English well."

"Speaks English? How comes that about? Who taught her?"

"We did, Monella and I. After our arrival here, and when we could speak their language well enough, I had classes; and now there are many at the court who can speak fairly well. You see your friends chatting with them now."

"That's been puzzling me for some time," said Wydale. "I *thought* they were conversing, yet could

not understand how that could be. Hullo, Georgy ! Are you deigning to take some notice of your old friend, or do you feel too high in the world amongst these grandees ? ”

This was addressed to the lad, who had thus far kept close to his sister.

“ I say, Mr. Wydale,” said George in answer, “ isn’t this just splendid ? But,” he went on, in a low and slightly anxious tone, “ don’t you think, if they call sister Vanina ‘ Queen,’ that they ought to call me ‘ Prince ’ ? ”

This question was almost whispered, and Wydale could not help laughing at the conceit and at the serious air with which it was advanced.

But, before he could reply, they were at the entrance to the palace, where they were received by officials, guards, and footmen, all attired in striking and resplendent dress, whether suits of armour or liveries. Through these they passed on into a courtyard, then along broad corridors ornamented, some with statuary, others with frescoes on the walls, of exquisite colours and design ; the marble floors covered in places with soft carpets cleverly worked in fashions and patterns that were altogether new to Wydale and his friends. At last they were ushered into a large chamber, in which about two dozen persons were assembled. At one end was a raised daïs and a canopy that covered three seats or thrones of ivory and gold, beautifully carved and set with jewels. Over them, at the back of the canopy, was an artistic figure of a flying crane embroidered in gold on crimson drapery.

On one of the ivory seats was a fair young girl of about eighteen years of age. Her figure was slight

and girlish, and her face was of that character of beauty that wins all hearts more by its air of appealing innocence than by its actual loveliness. She was dressed in a simple costume of a delicate lavender—a flowing robe drawn in by a girdle at the waist—with a golden coronet upon her head. Upon her breast was a figure of a bird in precious stones, and in the coronet blazed large diamonds of extraordinary fire and brilliancy.

At the entrance of the little party the young girl turned and gazed at the new-comers with friendly interest, and in the glance of the large, truthful-looking eyes could be seen, for a moment, a curious, perplexed expression. Then she smiled and, rising, advanced at once to meet Vanina. She took her hands in hers and kissed her on each cheek, then drew back, still holding her hands and regarding her with a tender scrutiny.

“And so you have come at last, Queen Sister!” she said, with a contented sigh. “And at last I see you in the flesh as I have often seen you in my dreams, and in—ah! you shall know that presently. And you see I have learned your language, so that, when you came, I could greet you and talk to you as a sister should. For we shall be sisters, shall we not?”

And, putting one arm round her visitor, she led her to the raised dais, and, leaving her there seated, returned to extend a kindly welcome to the others, whom Monella severally introduced.

George she kissed, laughingly saying, “We shall be brother and sister, you and I;” and to Wydale, as to the rest, her greeting was cordial and full of grace and dignity.

Monella then turned and addressed those assembled in the room, his words being interpreted to Wydale, in an undertone, by the doctor.

“Friends! ye all know how that, long before I came amongst you, there were ancient prophecies extant in the land, and known unto all the people, to the effect that in the hour of your utmost need a Queen should be sent to you from across the oceans to lead you on to final victory against your foes. Ye know, also that, whilst I and my friend have sojourned with you, we have done all that lay in our power to fight your enemies, and to give you the advantage of the greater experience that we have derived from our travels in the outside world. But for the want of those appliances that we know have been invented, and are now employed in warfare in that outer world, we could not help you all we wished. Our counsel, the strength of our right arms, aye, and even our blood, we have freely given; but victory has not as yet declared itself on our side. Now to-day the ancient prophecies are fulfilled, for behold a gracious Queen, stately and beautiful even as your own Princess, has come across the seas to aid you; and her name is that which we were told to look for—Vanina!” (At this there was a burst of loud applause.) “Yes, friends! the one ye looked for has arrived; the great God has sent her at the moment of our greatest need. Let us do her all honour, and accord to her a welcome worthy of this ancient people and of the blessings and gifts Heaven has sent us at her hands. For know ye that she brings with her many wonderful gifts that shall not only aid in conquering our enemies, but shall prove blessings to the land for long years after

the final victory shall have been won, and peace and prosperity shall have been secured. These wonders ye shall shortly see for yourselves; they are stowed away in the body of the great ship with the towering masts in which she has sailed hither. Haply ye had looked to see her arrive in other guise, attended by fleets and armies to fight your battles for you; haply ye may feel some surprise that she should come to you in such simple guise, and attended only by two or three of her kinsmen. But be not deceived; it is ever thus with the blessings Heaven doth vouchsafe us—the greatest, the most precious, constantly come to us in the most homely garb. Therefore I say, judge not by outward pomp and show; for, if ye had any thought that Heaven would send fleets and armies to fight your battles, then indeed have ye been misled. In the countries we come from we have the proverb, ‘God helps those who help themselves,’ which means, to apply it here, that God will help you to fight your battles, but will not fight them for you. It is sufficient that all, henceforth, will fight with bolder, stouter hearts, because we know that the hour of victory draws nigh.

“And now, friends, your newly-arrived visitors are tired, and need repose. They would leave you for a while for refreshment, and to change the garments of travel for those of the country they come to aid. In a few hours’ time they will join you again, and will be pleased to receive further assurances of your welcome and ungrudging homage and support.”

Having finished this address, Monella turned and spoke a few words to the princess, who invited Vanina and her friends to accompany her to another chamber;

and they passed out accordingly, receiving and returning on their way the respectful salutations of those present.

They entered a gilded saloon with couches or divans around, whereon were soft cushions, while here and there were little tables. The apartment opened on to a balcony, from which could be seen, in one direction, a broad expanse of smiling landscape ; in the other the frowning, perpendicular wall of cliff of the other island, with its hanging terraces and castellated walls and towers.

Only George, Dareville, Wydale, and the doctor accompanied the princess and Vanina and Monella into this chamber, and the last-named suggested that the new-comers should first partake of some refreshment.

So, after a light meal, whereat were many curious dishes and strange but luscious fruits, mingled with wines of delicate and captivating flavours, during which there was very little talk on either side, the servants departed, and left the little party to themselves. Then Monella proceeded to tell what was in his thoughts.

"You must know," he said, addressing himself to Dareville and his friend, "that there have been abroad in this land, since quite ancient times, prophecies that in the time of the country's greatest trouble, in its darkest hour, and when its defenders felt themselves most sorely pressed, a ship should come across the sea carrying one bearing the name of Vanina ; that this lady should become a ruler in the land, and should lead its defenders to victory, and restore peace and happiness to its inhabitants."

Here he waved his hand to Vanina, who was about to speak, to bid her keep silence for a while.

"Now," he went on, "the time of our sorest trouble seems to have arrived. This people has been driven from their ancient city—their homes in the island that belongs to them—by a section of their nation who prefer to follow idolaters and sorcerers and magicians, and a cruel, blood-guilty priesthood, who carry out revolting human sacrifices to obscene monsters. But, although thus driven from their homes, they have maintained themselves, for a long period on this island—known as the island of Dilanda—by force of arms, that is, by their superiority in fighting in their war vessels. Of late, however, this has not been invariably the case; the fortune of war has gone against us—for I identify myself now with them—and we have received more than one grievous defeat. Emboldened by this, our enemies have been occupying themselves, for some time past, in the construction and fitting out of a great armada that is to overwhelm our fleet, capture our city here, and give over the inhabitants into slavery—which means that many of them would be reserved as victims for their hideous sacrifices.

"This is not all, however; I grieve to say that a strange apathy seems to have fallen upon the people, even upon my fighting men. I cannot fully understand it. No doubt they have lost heart through their recent defeats; that is but natural; but it does not wholly account for what I have remarked. And, having much pondered upon the matter, I have concluded that it may arise in part from the reliance they are placing upon these old prophecies, for they are

well known amongst all classes. Their thoughts run somewhat thus :—‘ If help is coming to us from over the sea, what is the use of our striving and risking our lives meanwhile? And again, how can we hope to succeed, since we know that the hour of our triumph is not to be until our promised queen arrives?’ Such thoughts, you must perceive, are fatal to all enterprise, to all effort, even to manly courage itself; and the people I have led and have formerly found true and brave, are, I am grieved and ashamed to confess, fast lapsing into a race of cowards!”

The princess here uttered an exclamation of protest.

“ Aye, aye, princess; I well know your kind heart, that likes not to hear hard words said of your people; but, unfortunately, they are true, and this is a time of difficulty and of threatening danger, and it is not, therefore, a fit occasion for refusing to look facts in the face.

“ I feel assured,” he went on sadly, “ that, if what I hear through my spies of this armada is anything like unto truth, then to face it with our forces in their present mood will be but too surely to court defeat. Yet do I know that my men are true and loyal and trustworthy; they lack only spirit, enthusiasm, that *élan* that alone can lead men on to victory. At this critical time Heaven comes to our aid with what seems to be a veritable miracle. Heaven has sent us over the far seas a ship with a cargo of articles unheard of in this country, and that will excite the wonder of our people. Many of them will aid us greatly in our warfare. For the contents

of this welcome ship, and for their use, we are able and willing to pay those in charge of her three—aye ten times the sum they are worth in the outer world. But,” glancing at Vanina, “that is only an item of the miracle; for in this same goodly ship Heaven ordained that there should come to us a maiden called Vanina, the name of her the people here have been so long expecting.

“But the maiden hesitates to accept the destiny marked out for her. She objects that in coming here she had no special thought or conscious mission, that chance alone drifted hither the vessel in which she came—as though there were such a thing as ‘chance’ in the ordering of the world! In reply to her objection, I have urged that each of us is bound to accept the position ordered for us, that many, themselves unconscious of their fitness and the fact, are chosen and deputed by Heaven upon special missions; and finally, that it is her manifest duty to yield to its guidance so unmistakably displayed. For how can it be otherwise? Suppose, then, that she refuse, are we to wait for another ship with another maiden who shall bear the name Vanina? That would be waiting for a miracle in good sooth.”

The Princess Idelia turned an appealing glance upon Vanina, and laid her hand affectionately upon her arm.

“How now, my sister?” she exclaimed. “Surely it cannot be so? Yours is the golden hour—the opportunity to do great good to all of us, for which we shall be ever grateful. You hear what the good Lord Monella, the leader of our forces, says. Our people want heartening, they want enthusiasm. I,

alas, cannot hearten them, partly because I have no heart for martial deeds, partly because they look to someone else. They believe our troubles will end only when a queen named Vanina comes from across the seas to lead them on to victory. And now that you have arrived at last, surely our trials near their end. I gladly yield to you the place I know I can never fitly occupy. Therefore, why further hesitate?"

"But, dear princess," Vanina said, "how can I, a stranger, knowing nothing of such matters, take from you the place that is your birthright—the place to which you must have looked forward all your life?"

"Nay, nay, regard it not so, my sister. If you refuse, soon there may be no kingdom to be governed, either by me or you. Therefore, in resigning my throne to you, I give up to-day only what would most likely be taken from me by force of arms to-morrow. And, beyond all this, I am already tired and saddened by the life we have been leading, with its uncertainties and alarms and dreadful bloodshed. If, therefore, your taking my place will bring about an era of peace and happiness for our harassed people, then do I yield it you, not only without regret, but with a joyful heart."

"But still I see not how this that you expect can come to pass. You are making some great mistake," Vanina urged.

"Let us do what is our manifest duty in this life, and leave the rest to Heaven," interposed Monella solemnly. "It is not for us to refuse because we cannot foresee the designs of Providence."

"And, finally, listen, sister. I have seen *you* again

and again in my dreams. I *know* there is no other Vanina to delay for. I have seen, too, those you bring with you ; and, to convince you that that is true, I can show you sketches I have made, for I can draw and paint a little. Come with me, all of you, and I will show you."

So saying, she rose and led the way into another apartment, at one end of which a curtain hung before the wall. Pulling this aside, she showed to the astonished company a large fresco, covering the wall, with nearly life-size figures of the four, and in the background the *Saucy Fan*. There was no mistaking those depicted, and the execution of the work was excellent. At sight of their surprise the princess clapped her hands, and laughed without restraint.

" See now how my visions were impressed upon my mind," she cried. " But indeed I was at first afraid to show you this, fearing you might laugh at my ideas of art, for I have heard that where you come from you have great painters."

" We will leave you alone for a while," said Monella to the princess and Vanina. " Do you talk upon this matter, and I doubt not you will arrange it as we wish ;" and he motioned to the others to follow him into the chamber they had just quitted.

After some little time spent in desultory converse, Monella was summoned to the conference of the two girls, and presently the three returned together.

" We have arrived at an understanding," he informed the others. " By the laws of Atlantis, the king or queen cannot be crowned until after many ceremonies have been performed ; and, further, until he or she has resided at least a year in the city in which the

coronation is to be enacted. Seeing, therefore, that a certain period must elapse before the maiden Vanina can be formally installed as queen, it has been agreed that all proceedings to that end shall be postponed until a time of less general anxiety. In the meantime the maiden will take rank as Princess Vanina of Atlantis, and will reign jointly with the Princess Idelia. That, I think, my friends, will meet all our needs. The army will have their long-expected Queen Vanina before their eyes, to hearten them, if it can so do ; and they will be informed that she refuses to be formally crowned until such time as they shall have proved that they deserve the favour by defeating her opponents. Is that not so, princess ? ”

Idelia clapped her hands in the impulsive fashion that belonged to her.

“That is well said,” she cried. “Now have I indeed a sister-princess.”

“I will take the necessary steps to call together the nobles and elders, and have the matter, as set forth, confirmed by law,” Monella said.

“And what do you think of all this ? ” Vanina asked of Wydale and her brother, coming over to them and taking them aside.

“As for me,” returned Sydney instantly, “I say, ‘Go in and win.’ We’ll help you all we can.”

She looked at Wydale.

“You have known my opinion for some time,” he said. “I said you always reminded me of a warrior queen. Strange that I should have had those thoughts and used those very words.”

“And stranger still,” she murmured dreamily, “that I seem to have been through it all before in the dreams and visions of the night.”

CHAPTER XII.

PRINCE ROKTA.

WHEN the conference described in the previous chapter broke up, the new-comers were led to apartments that had already been prepared for them, that they might rest and change their attire for costumes of the country. Of these a considerable wardrobe had been set out for them to choose from, many of the dresses being court suits of rich materials, ornamented with gold embroidery and precious stones. Dareville and Wydale found that their rooms adjoined, and the worthy doctor, who accompanied them thither, gave them the benefit of his own experience in the choice of vestments.

"We wear armour," he informed them, "only during the day, or when and where there is reason to fear attack. Here, in the town and in the palace, it is not needful. All approaches are watched and patrolled by scouts who would give timely notice of any descent in force upon the palace.

"This evening," he went on, after a pause, "there will be a grand reception in honour of your arrival. I should recommend you now to have a bath and take a rest, and when it is time, I will come again to fetch you."

That evening there was a great assemblage of

the nobles and principal court functionaries, who thronged the Great Hall of Audience in the palace, and the adjacent galleries and terraces. Their court dresses—many of them of the brightest and gayest colours, yet tasteful in design and tone—sparkled with flashing jewels, as did the hilts and scabbards of the swords and daggers each one carried. They stood about in groups laughing and talking, or bustled to and fro exchanging a word here and there. Everyone seemed in the best of spirits, and the low hum and buzz of conversation, varied by occasional ripples of laughter that were good-humoured without being noisy, told plainly enough of the general feeling that the occasion was both an important and a happy one.

The interior of the palace was everywhere brilliantly illuminated with hanging lamps, and formed a striking scene. Viewed from the terraces and other points of vantage in the gardens, gleams of glowing light could be seen through the windows and entrances thrown open to admit the cool evening air. Without, also, amongst the statues placed everywhere about, were bronze figures holding braziers, from which lambent flames leaped up into the air, throwing around changeful, dancing shadows.

Amid it all came the soft, cool music of falling water from plashing fountains, both in the gardens and in the inner courts. But most curious of all was the fact that some of these in the gardens were themselves centres of light, their waters, thrown high in air and falling into basins below, being veritable cascades of fire. They threw dazzling, phosphorescent gleams around, which, mingling with the dancing

shadows from the braziers, added a touch of weirdness to the picturesque features of the scene. Below and beyond could be seen the lights of the city, and those upon the watch-towers placed at intervals along the shore. Here sentinels paced to and fro throughout the night, many of them, doubtless, looking up with rather envious eyes at the edifice in which, as they knew, the great meeting was taking place, and which could be seen from all parts around like an illuminated fairy palace built high in the air. Each sentinel had beside him, upon his watch-tower, other braziers charged ready for instant ignition to give the alarm should occasion call for it.

Amongst the groups on the terraces, Wydale and Dareville strolled about, viewing with keen and lively interest all that was going on. With them were the doctor, Ombrian, the commander of the fleet, and Kremna, a young warrior, who was one of Monella's immediate followers or "aides."

He had been charged by Monella to attend the two young men. Ombrian was a tall, dark man of imposing mien, with hair and beard that had once been black, but was now just beginning to turn grey. Self-contained, he was little given to talk, and, when he spoke, his voice had a certain gruffness in it that, though at first unattractive, was not unpleasant to those who had grown to know and understand him. As to Kremna, he was a light-haired, blue-eyed young fellow, full of vivacity, energy, and chatter; but straightforward and brave, and devoted to Monella, and, as a consequence, ready at once to make friends with any friends of his chief.

Wydale inquired of the doctor the meaning of the

"fiery fountains," as he called them. "We saw," he said, "cascades of the same character, in the bay when we first anchored."

"It is a sight certainly calculated to impress strangers; it was the case with us when we first came," the doctor replied, "and it argues, moreover, much ingenuity on the part of those, whoever they were, who originally thought out the idea. But they only cleverly took advantage of the fact that all the sea water about here is strongly phosphorescent, and throws out vivid gleams of light whenever stirred or splashed about. Over in Atlantis are extensive grottoes and subterranean galleries in the vitreous rock—they call them here the 'Crystal Grottoes or Caverns.'"

"Anywhere near the underground galleries I went through with Monella last night?" asked Wydale.

"Precisely; yes. You must have passed through some of the galleries which lead out of the grottoes. Well, the latter are partly lighted in a very ingenious fashion; the crystal columns left in hewing out the caverns—for they are mainly artificial—are hollow, and form conduits more or less transparent, for water which is pumped up into extensive reservoirs, above. The pumps are engines of no mean size and power, and they go on everlastingly, day and night, worked partly by the tides, and partly by the fresh water streams from the heights. The overflow runs away into the bay you speak of, and forms, at night, the phosphorescent cascades you saw there. The same principle has been applied here."

"I notice," Wydale presently remarked, "that the architecture, though fine, seems inferior to that which

so impressed me over in the ruins, which, you say, are those of the actual ancient city of Atlantis."

"That is so. And you may notice the same thing to even a greater extent in the frescoes and mural decorations here. The statues and fountains you see around, too, are mostly old; they were brought, in fact, from the old town. The truth is that art, and, in a measure, craftsmanship, are dying out with us; probably for want of the stimulus of outside competition to keep them up to the mark. There are few artificers here now, save armourers; these have been kept in practice by the civil wars or internecine fights and struggles which have always, I understand, been more or less continuous."

"I wonder they have not exterminated one another long ago," commented Owen.

"They have done their little best in that direction, certainly," replied the doctor, with grim emphasis. "What with fighting and their human sacrifices."

"Human sacrifices!" Wydale shivered.

"Ah, yes; abominable and hateful rites they have—over in King Kara's country. There they still sacrifice human beings to their gods; and, I am told, also to feed the monstrous flying creatures you have seen. Formerly, too, there were feuds and fights with the 'Flower-Dwellers.'"

"What—who are they? Wydale asked.

"In this group," replied the doctor, "besides those you know of, are some smaller islands, but only one of these is of any size. It is called Sylia, and is said to be inhabited by a terrible race—ferocious, merciless. Worse even, they say, than the Karanites, because more skilled in warfare and dark sciences.

There are wonderful tales about these people; but, thank goodness—if the tales are true—they are willing enough to keep to their own territory, and not interfere with the dwellers in the other islands so long as they are let alone.”

“But what a singular name—‘Flower-Dwellers!’”

This talk had taken place between Owen and the doctor while they strolled along in the wake of Dareville and his two companions. At times when they neared one of the groups that stood about, the conversation had been interrupted that the strangers might be introduced, and exchange a few words of greeting, and then pass on. Ombrian heard Wydale’s last remark, and turned to answer him.

“The ‘Flower-Dwellers,’” said he, in excellent English. “Ah! I have fought with them; or, rather, tried to. But you cannot; they do not give you a chance. They simply strike you dead; my men fell round me like saplings struck by the lightning. As for me, how I escaped I know not; only three of us came back.”

“But what are they like?” Dareville put in.

“You cannot tell; no man has seen their faces, for they always wear masks,” was the strange reply.

Further conversation was interrupted by a general move towards the central hall of the palace. Evidently some signal had been given that the hour for the audience had arrived.

When the hall was reached, a large concourse was to be seen standing or sitting round in ranks four or five deep. At one end, upon a raised platform, was a richly worked throne with high carved back in

ivory and gold, and roomy enough for five or six persons to be seated upon it at one time. It was rounded in shape, forming a semi-circular background to the room. Close to it were conspicuous, standing on one side, Monella and another whose appearance at once arrested the attention of the strangers, and who was afterwards known to them as Gralda, the High Priest.

Gralda was an old man of imposing presence with fine features and bright clear eyes. His hair and beard were long, and white as snow; not so tall as Monella, he yet was of unusual height, and would have appeared still taller, but for a slight stoop. There was in the expression of his face a mingling of benevolence and world-weariness; and this was emphasised by his stoop. There was at once a likeness and a contrast between the two men, for while Monella's erect figure and great muscular frame, combined with the piercing eyes and usually alert, searching look, seemed to belong rather to a man in the very prime of life than to a grey-beard, yet at times there would come into his glance that same dreamy, world-weary expression that was more or less habitual to Gralda.

Something of this must have been passing in the mind of the doctor, for he said, half to his companion and half to himself, "I would give something to know which is the older of those two men."

The remark seemed to amuse his hearer, who was about to reply, when he caught Monella's eye, and read in it, and in a slight gesture that accompanied the look, an invitation to approach him.

Monella was very plainly dressed in a sort of tunic of white, with a belt of black, and a cloak of black and

white. His attire was in marked contrast, in its simplicity and absence of all ornament, with that of those by whom he was surrounded. Gralda wore a flowing robe of a bright red, with a figure of a rising sun embroidered in gold and diamonds upon the breast. Upon his head he wore a narrow circlet, which had in the front a similar, though a much smaller figure. He received the two young men, when presented to him by Monella, with kindly courtesy, but, since he did not speak English, he said nothing beyond a few words of welcome, which were interpreted to them by Dr. Manleth.

And then there was first a stir, and then a general hush, and the new-comers, turning, saw entering the room a young man of striking appearance, very richly dressed, who came slowly towards the dais with an air that was careless and somewhat haughty, yet singularly courtly and attractive. In face and figure he was remarkably—almost wonderfully—handsome. He had the cast of features that we know as ancient Greek, with dark hair and eyes, a flowing moustache, and a supple, graceful figure that many sculptors would have been glad to be able to secure as a model for Apollo. This was well-shown off by a close-fitting costume of white and gold, adorned on the breast with the figure of a flying crane which, as the strangers had seen, was a common emblem in the country.

As he stepped up on to the dais, closely followed by two who seemed to be in attendance, the doctor murmured low :

“ Prince Rokta ! ”

Whether he of whom he spoke had heard the words, or that his turning round at the moment was acci-

dental, was not quite clear. But so it was that he just then glanced in their direction, and, seeing the two strangers, regarded them with a peculiarly searching gaze.

Although there was nothing in the stranger's manner that was offensive, neither Dareville nor Wydale felt quite at ease; the former in particular, in the impulsive manner that belonged to him, felt tempted to resent it. But Dr. Manleth quickly introduced them; whereupon Prince Rokta greeted them in an easy manner, and with a smile, speaking a few words in very excellent English. Then going up to Monella and Gralda he inquired :

"What is this I hear the princess has done? Is it true that she has offered to vacate her place to put in it a stranger?"

"My son," said Gralda, "thou knowest it was so arranged. Thou didst offer no objection when it was suggested the other day at the meeting of our council. The Lord Monella, who was present, will remember it."

"The prince will doubtless recall," joined in Monella, "the announcement of the expected arrival of the strangers, and the fact that he gave his consent in the event of their appearance to what has since been done."

"Yes; *if*, my Lord Monella," rejoined Rokta, with some heat. "But little did I then think that what I regarded as a fantastic dream was actually about to happen."

At this moment Ombrian, Manleth, and two or three others approached, and joined in the conversation.

"It is not a question," began Ombrian bluntly, "who is to be princess here so much as whether shortly there will be an independent country to reign over. For my part, having heard the will of the people declared to-day, I adopt their views."

"It seems to me," said Monella coldly, "that the prince should have been present with us to-day."

"How so, sir?" retorted Rokta, "have I not been about my duties? Could I go round the island to inspect all the stations in less time?"

"Still," returned Monella quickly, "thou wert told—"

"Oh, a truce to your dreams and visions! Ever since I was a boy I have heard cackle of this sort! Thou knowest well, however, that I have no sympathy with such fancies; I am a soldier, a man of action, and of deeds, and not a dreamer!"

Before any reply could be made to this unlooked-for outburst, there was again a stir at the further end of the hall, betokening some fresh arrival.

This time it was the Princess Idelia, accompanied by Vanina, George, and several attendants; and there was much cheering and clapping of hands as the little procession passed up the room to the dais. As for Prince Rokta, when he caught sight of Vanina, he gazed at her with a glance that was full of wonder, mingled with very evident admiration. Certainly she looked very charming; and dressed as she was now, in a costume after the manner of the ladies of the court, but richer far than any of those about her, it was not surprising that she should rivet his attention. Evidently the Princess Idelia in welcoming her, and offering to give place to her, was resolved not to do things

by halves. The richest dresses, the most precious jewels had been placed at her disposal ; nay, she had herself insisted upon dressing her new friend, and choosing her ornaments, placing around her neck her choicest necklet, and upon her head a coronet like her own. She now advanced toward Rokta, and introduced him to Vanina with a gladsome pride that was very pleasing to behold.

"Behold, Rokta," she exclaimed, "my dear sister, our long promised Vanina ; your future—"

Here Vanina put up her hand to stop further speech.

"Nay," said she, "let us not speak of the future ; it will suffice just now to speak only of to-day. Let me, Prince Rokta, state to you my thanks for the kindly reception I and my friends have met with in this city."

Prince Rokta advanced slowly and took her hand, and, bending over it with that courtly ease which, it was plain to see, was with him a sort of second nature, he said :

"Princess, I am glad to hear what you say, and to add my welcome to that of the people of this country. Accept my apologies for having not been present when you arrived to-day. We have to be diligent and watchful, and I was away on necessary soldier's duties, making sure that all our guards were at their posts. Thus, I trust, my absence has not been without its advantages, since I have been doing my best to secure the safety of so fair a guest."

"Nay, Rokta," said Idelia laughing, "no guest at all ; guests come and go, but Vanina, I trust, will stay with us for ever."

"I hope so, too," said Rokta, with another bow, and glancing while he spoke into Vanina's face with a look so full of meaning that she flushed and showed confusion.

But Idelia put her arm round her and drew her aside.

"Come and sit down," said she. "There are many waiting to be presented to you;" and she took her to the centre of the throne at the end of the room.

Meanwhile Manleth introduced George to the prince, who received him with much favour. He was soon engaged in animated conversation, the boy, quite at his ease, giving a lively narrative of some of his adventures.

Then, to the strangers' great surprise, there came into the hall a band of musicians. They were provided with harps and other instruments of novel design, but—as soon appeared—very effective and sweet in tone.

This orchestra played first some concerted pieces, the like of which none of the new-comers had ever heard before. In them the most tenderly-conceived melodies, full of a dreamy fascination, were intermingled with passages of such rugged harmony and weird, moving power, that those who heard them for the first time were astounded. Never, in the outer world, had they listened to such music; never would they have dreamed that anything so charming, so fascinating, yet so different from anything they had heard before, could have been produced by such curious, almost uncouth-looking instruments.

When, after a little while, there came a pause, Vanina sighed.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" she exclaimed—and in what she said she expressed, besides her own, the feelings of Wydale and her brother. "I have never heard music that has so deeply moved me. Truly, you must have some great masters of the art here to be able to produce such music and such players."

Idelia laughed and clapped her hands, according to her wont, when pleased.

"Listen to that all of you," she cried, and she looked round. "In one thing, at least, then, we can both surprise and please our friends. But you shall listen to more of this another time. We go on now to the dancing. Let us see whether you will enjoy that too."

And she insisted, with friendly persistence, that her guests should join in the dances which ensued, notwithstanding that these were, of course, quite new to them. There was no lack of good-humoured assistance on all sides, and the strangers managed to acquit themselves fairly well, entering fully into the spirit of the entertainment. Vanina found a willing instructor in Prince Rokta, who danced with her many times that night.

Some time later, during a pause in the dancing, Prince Rokta went up to Monella, who was standing in the centre of a small group aside, and, extending his hand to him, he said :

"My Lord Monella, I have to express my regret, and to ask your indulgence for what I said a short time ago. Little did I think that your dreams and prophecies would end in bringing us such a gracious

and charming visitor. I am sure she is, indeed, well worthy to be our queen, and I only regret that I was not one of the first to greet and to bow the knee to her."

Monella acknowledged this speech with a dignified inclination of the head and one of his curious half-smiles, but made no direct reply.

That night, after the festivities had ended, Wydale, walking slowly and alone to his apartment, met Monella, who laid his hand kindly on his shoulder, and, gazing at him keenly, said :

"My son, you seem unhappy and disturbed. This is not a good beginning for your stay amongst us."

Wydale glanced up at him, and something in the look he read there gained his confidence.

"I fear," he said sadly, "there is trouble in the air."

"Aye," said Monella, "there is trouble in the air; but when is there not? But keep up thy faith and courage, and leave the rest to a higher power. Remember, a battle is never lost till it is won. Good-night; and God be with you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GROTTOS OF A THOUSAND LIGHTS.

DURING the days that followed, the attention of the community into which the passengers of the *Saucy Fan* had so strangely drifted was chiefly occupied with the unloading of the vessel. This was a work of time and of some difficulty, for Monella, for some reasons that were not given, desired that the unloading should not take place where she then lay, but in the "cavern" opposite, where, it appeared, he had workshops. In order to effect this, the masts and rigging were first removed; the hull was then towed across the intervening space of water.

In due time various portions of the cargo were brought from the "cavern" back to the harbour and docks, and when they were landed on the quays and opened, the excitement rose to fever height. Vague rumours then flew from mouth to mouth concerning the wonderful "gifts" brought into the country, for the use and advantage of her people, by their heaven-sent queen that was to be.

Monella, furnished by Dareville with a catalogue of the cargo, was quick to appreciate the impression that could be made upon the people by these "wonders"—as they seemed to them—as well as the more solid advantage to which they could be turned.

"I had hoped for arms," he said, "but since Providence has sent us something else, it is for us to make the best of what has been vouchsafed us. It is fortunate that both the launch and the steam engine can be worked with petroleum, of which there is plenty here, instead of coal, of which we have very little. Formerly there were coal mines here, but they gave out ages ago. With the launch, the fireworks, the life-saving rockets, and the small cannon much may be accomplished."

"I should think so," rejoined Wydale, who with Dareville was assisting. "How would it be to fit the brig up as a great barge, to be propelled by oars? She could run down half your fleet at one crash, and scarcely feel it."

"A good idea, but there are difficulties. It was necessary to take her masts out in order to get her into where she now lies; but that does not matter, seeing that I had already decided to convert her into a fore and aft schooner; that is to say, to alter her to the rig of a schooner-yacht."

"Why so?" the two young men asked in surprise.

"Because, if the opportunity ever offer to get away from here, we shall be very short-handed, and our only chance of sailing her successfully to the nearest port would be to do away with the square sails."

"Ah, yes; I see. You look forward then to leaving here one day? You do not think we are to stay here for the remainder of our days?"

Monella gazed inquiringly at Wydale, who had put this question.

"Certainly, I hope to get away," he answered. "And I suppose you do, too. Those who have lived

in the world beyond are not fitted to turn lotus-eaters, and lead a life of idleness in a place like this. I, at least, have work to do elsewhere."

"I feel you are right, sir. But who will navigate the vessel?" Owen asked.

"I will."

"And when?"

Monella passed his hands across his eyes, a way he had at times, and his glance wandered away dreamily into the distance, as though his thoughts had travelled far afield, and he had forgotten the subject of their talk. Then suddenly he seemed to rouse himself, and looked at Wydale earnestly; laying his hand upon his shoulder, he replied:

"That, my son, I know not; it is in the hands of Him by whom we were directed hither. I only know this—it will not be until the work for which we were sent here is completed."

Nor were Monella's expectations in other directions disappointed. The arrival of a vessel, that to the unsophisticated islanders seemed nothing less than a marvel of marine architecture, bringing one who bore the long-expected name Vanina, created an enthusiasm that quickly roused them from their listless, almost despondent, state. Drilling now went on daily, and both officers and men began to show a zeal and alacrity and an interest in learning and mastering the art of war, that were full of promise of success. So at least the doctor thought.

"It is hardly like the same place," he declared one day to Wydale.

"Everyone goes bustling about with an air of business-like determination wholly different from

the apathy that formerly reigned supreme ! All our fighting men are drilling and practising with a will—and they need it to succeed—for they have of late been lamentably lax and careless—especially the archers. Even Monella's wonderful shooting failed to imbue them with heart or emulation."

"That Monella is a good shot with bow and arrow I have had ample evidence," said Wydale. "But how did he come to be so expert at such an old-world exercise ?"

"That has always puzzled me," replied the doctor. "When we first came here the bows and arrows in use were very primitive sort of weapons. Monella first made a mighty bow for himself—one that no one else can draw—like Ulysses of old. He manufactured arrows to match, and then showed what he could do with them, to the astonishment of all, myself included. Then he set to work to teach the people how to make like weapons for themselves ; or, rather, he taught the armourers to make them for the fighting men. He has introduced many other improvements, too, in the arming and equipment of both men and boats ; with the result that, whereas our forces were before decidedly inferior to those opposed to them, they are now nearly equal ; or would be if the men had but the spirit."

"And what are the 'enemy' doing now, do you suppose ? And why do we hear and see nothing of them ?"

"For the reason that there has been between the two forces one of these informal truces, or mutual cessation of active fighting, that occasionally obtain in all long and tedious wars. This is why you were

unmolested ; and it was fortunate that you arrived at such a time. Otherwise, you would very likely have been captured, and taken to their city to be given over to their priesthood, and your vessel would have been plundered."

"Then that fate may now befall the scoundrels who deserted us," observed Wydale, a little grimly. "And when do you expect the next attack?"

"That, of course, we cannot tell ; but Monella, who somehow gets to know something of what is going on, does not expect it at the moment. But he believes we shall have all we can do to repel it when it comes, for he has information that they are making the most strenuous preparations—fitting out, as he said the other day, an invincible 'armada.'"

"But if he has spies in the other camp, may they not also have spies here, and so get to know of our arrival and its results?"

"It may be so, of course ; but I hope not."

Meantime, solemn councils of the nobles and elders of the people had been held, at which Vanina had been duly recognised as a princess, and their Queen-elect ; her brothers being at the same time given the rank of prince, and Wydale the rank of noble, with a place high in command in the army under Monella.

All, too, were given uniforms and insignia and equipments appropriate to their rank ; and the two young men were now accordingly—somewhat, it must be confessed, against their own wills—habitually dressed in suits of light armour. This was during the day, while moving about amongst the populace and soldiery, or crossing to the "caverns" ; in the

evening, when attending receptions at the palace, armour was exchanged for lighter raiment.

One day a party started, under Ombrian's guidance, to pay a visit to the "caverns" and underground workings in the main island that were still held by the inhabitants of Dilanda. The two princesses were of the number, which included all the new-comers, as well as the doctor and some of the Court officials and ladies in attendance.

The trip across was made in one of the State barges, which was named *Princess Idelia*, after the princess, and it was escorted by five of the larger vessels of the fighting craft.

The day was oppressively hot. A tropical sun poured down upon a sea so calm that not so much as a ripple disturbed its glassy surface. The light awning that was swung over the deck scarce sufficed to break the burning rays, and afforded but slight mitigation of the heat. The cliffs and hanging terraces of Atlantis were slightly shaded, and towered, murky and mysterious-looking, in a thin haze. It was not, therefore, until the strangers were quite close that they were able to make out that here, as on the other side, were great water-gates, through which their vessel could pass. But these gave access, not as in the other case, to a harbour, but to a gloomy tunnel in the solid rock, that led to great caverns within. The oppressive heat now yielded to an atmosphere that was comparatively cool, and the dazzling sunlight and blue sky were succeeded by a sort of twilight. After some ceremony, involving much blowing of trumpets, and hoarse challenges and signals from sentinels on guard, the great gates

first opened, and then clanged behind them, with a noise that sent low rumblings echoing among the galleries. Then, at further trumpet blasts, other gates within swung slowly open, disclosing a considerable length of dark water channel, with a bright opening beyond. Finally, the barge came out into a scene that filled the visitors with surprise.

The narrow water-channel, cut through solid rock, opened suddenly out into an interior lake, in a vast cavern of such height that, though the whole extent was well lighted, the roof could not be seen. Here, around the borders of the water, were broad quays, and, beyond these, small caverns appeared in the rocky sides, in which were numbers of people busy with all kinds of work. The place was, indeed, a sort of underground dock with storehouses and workshops, lighted everywhere by great lamps and braziers, and ventilated by shafts that went up through the rock to the open air on the tops of the cliffs above. Here, reposing snugly upon the water, lay the *Saucy Fan*, dismasted, with many work people going to and fro, still engaged in unloading her.

At sight of the dismasted vessel, "Dear old *Saucy Fan*," Vanina cried. "How strange she looks—her masts and rigging gone, and laid up in so queer a place. What adventures she seems fated to go through! But why is this?"

"It is for the security of your vessel, princess," answered Ombrian; "that she may lie here in our safest retreat of all, beyond any possibility of mishap, till you require her. She could not have been got in here without taking down her masts."

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"And," added Dareville, "Monella purposes to give her a lighter rig, and make some other alterations, I believe."

"Well, I should like to go on board and see how she looks in circumstances so changed," rejoined Vanina.

There was no objection to this, and, after a ramble over the decks of the brig and down into the cabins, the party continued their journey, now to be made on foot, through the galleries and caverns.

These rocky passages were intricate and extensive. At times the visitors ascended flights of steps and came out on the hanging terraces which overhung the sea below.

From these were to be had views of the opposite island, and of the city they had just come from, surrounded by fortified walls and rocks, with the great gateways and towers that protected the entrance to the harbour. To right and to left of the island could be seen only an endless expanse of sea choked with weed, with here and there dark rocks sticking up amongst it.

The heat was now intense, and all were glad to leave the terraces and plunge again into the coolness of the inner passages, even though many of them were dark and gloomy, and lighted only by the lanterns their attendants carried.

Here and there these galleries opened into a large chamber used as a guard-house, whence, through barred gates, could be seen views beyond of the interior of the island. Descending again, they came to the level of the water, and followed, but in a contrary direction, for a short distance, the side of a

stream that ran into the lake or underground harbour wherein reposed the *Saucy Fan*. Then Prince Rokta stopped.

"We are now near," he said, "the great wonder of this underground place, *viz.*, the caves that we call the Grottoes of a Thousand Lights."

He opened a massive door of wood and iron that barred their further progress, and they entered the grotto.

Instantly the visitors became sensible of a delicious coolness, and the refreshing, swishing sound of falling water; then that the whole place gleamed with a peculiar light. It was not the light of the sun, for no rays could penetrate, nor of the moon, for she had not yet risen; it was not the light of burning oil or gas, or of any artificial illuminant that they had ever seen or heard of. It was prismatic, and scintillated in thousands—millions—of little shooting points of every colour, that seemed to dart in and out, to and fro, twinkling, leaping, dancing, ever in motion, and forming a combination that illuminated the whole scene with a soft and wonderful radiance that, though brilliant, was still grateful to the eye. The sides and the lofty roof were everywhere of a pure crystal as dazzling, wherever the light played upon it, as the diamond itself. Over it all—in every possible direction—and down the crystal columns which held up the roof—water played, running into tiny rivulets that made their way into glowing pools in the arched recesses of the place. And wherever the water touched, wherever it trickled, or splashed or tumbled, it seemed to burst into coruscations reflected in every prismatic angle of the jagged crystal in iridescent,

opalescent sparkles. The whole place seemed to be filled with a living light; a splendour, a lustre, that words cannot convey, or thought conceive. And when one came to look farther, there could be seen, on every side, sculptured forms of a thousand shapes and subjects, all lighted up in this strange fashion, all glowing with their own subtle fires.

The columns were carved in many ways; sometimes in flowers and leaves that twined round them from the roof above to the floor below. And so cunningly were they worked that the water ran in and out amongst, and through, and under the flowers and leaves; now a quarter of an inch or so beneath the surface of the crystal, now over its face, and anon plashing against the outlines. Everywhere as it ran, tossed to and fro, backwards and forwards, in tortuous little channels, it burst into minute fiery points that were reflected in the crystal in a hundred shades and colours. There were statues of men in finely worked chain armour; and groups of women in intricate lace robes that all scintillated with light; the hair and features, and the whole of the figure, shimmering in the same strange fashion. And there were ferns, and moss, and palms, and plants, and shrubs, all delicately and marvellously carved; statues of animals, of serpents, of other reptiles, every scale upon whose bodies glimmered with the same weird living light. In the pools were ships and boats, water plants, and fountains all thus lighted up; and finally there was a cascade that fell, a broad sheet of fire, from the roof into a basin below, sending out millions of sparkling particles on every side.

The visitors were full of exclamations of astonish-

ment and delight, as they wandered in and out about this fantastic storehouse, ever finding something fresh to excite their admiration. And the Princess Idelia clapped her hands and laughed like a pleased child while she listened to them.

"You can wander about for a long space thus, and ever find something new," she told Vanina.

"But—who could ever have done all this wonderful work, and thought out so many clever little devices to thus utilise the shining, sparkling water?" Vanina asked. "Why—think how long it must have taken!"

"Hundreds of years, I have heard Monella estimate," the doctor answered. "He reckons this place one of the great wonders of the world. It is supposed that it was originally designed—long ages ago—by some great King of Atlantis, as an adjunct to his palaces and gardens, and that the work was continued and extended by his successors through many generations. You observe there are figures of animals from almost all parts of the world—America, Africa, Europe—proof positive in itself that those who formerly ruled here were acquainted with distant quarters of the globe. They must have brought these animals from the countries they inhabit, even as did the Romans in later times. You can see the same things in the frescoes that are still visible on some of the ruins of the old city. It is interesting to speculate on what strange assemblages, fêtes, and festivals may have taken place here; what bygone peoples may have wandered in and out as we are doing to-day."

CHAPTER XIV.

MONELLA FIGHTS THE VAMPIRE.

IT was only with some difficulty, and after loudly expressing their admiration and their reluctance to quit the place, that the visitors were presently persuaded to turn their backs on the grotto, to plunge again into the gloomy subterranean passages. On their way back through the galleries they noticed barred gates that shut off other galleries.

In reply to their inquiry as to where these led to, Dr. Manleth said nobody seemed quite to know. They were mostly blocked with heaps of rubbish which prevented further exploration.

"I think our friend Monella knows more about them than anyone else," he added. "He had them explored, so far as was found practicable, and then caused the gates to be fixed to shut them off; for what reason I cannot tell you."

Presently they reached one of the guard-houses looking out across the interior of the island. It was much larger than the others, and consisted of two roomy chambers, each shut off by strong barred gates. Wydale quickly recognised the place as that outside which he had first met Monella.

At Vanina's earnest request, the gates were thrown

open for them, and they were allowed to go out on to a narrow terrace beyond.

"It was from here," said Wydale, "that Monella sent flying to its mark the arrow which saved George and myself from that villain Foster. I wonder what became of the scoundrel after all!"

"Yes," George exclaimed. "See, Vanina! There, below, is the rock on which we stood, and yonder you can see the ruined city we came through."

The terrace upon which they were was in the shade, and the heat was less than when they had been upon the hanging terraces on the outer cliffs. There was now more haze, and, while the ruins could be plainly seen, the view did not extend very far beyond them; but in the dim distance could just be discerned what looked like a high and precipitous mountain; also, shimmering in the sunshine, the lake, reflecting their shapes in trembling, distorted forms. And from the lake ran a broad winding stream that disappeared almost beneath where they were standing.

"Those ruins," said Doctor Manleth, addressing Vanina, "are all that remain to-day of the ancient city of Atlantis, the chief town of the extensive island (or maybe group of islands) called by that name, which, as some assert—and the statement is borne out by the ancient legends and traditions of the people here—was once the home of a mighty, conquering nation. A great power that, placed between the American Continent on the one side, and Europe and Africa on the other, actually, it is affirmed, held sway in all of them. Indeed—still according to tradition—the so called island must

have been a continent in itself—even as we to-day call the great island of Australia a continent—and it was so placed that while its people could overrun the shores of the Mediterranean and other countries in the east, they could as easily reach America in the west. It is, in fact, declared that in those days Atlantis was the queen-city of the world.”

“How I should like to see more of the fine old city!” exclaimed Vanina. “Cannot we walk over to it? It is not far; and the sun is still high.”

Prince Rokta glanced inquiringly at Ombrian, who shook his head.

Idelia shivered, and so did George; nor could Wydale repress a shudder.

Vanina glanced from one to another in some wonder; then she looked out upon the scene that lay before them. All was still and peaceful; there was no living creature to be seen. The green trees that grew near the ruins and beside the water looked inviting; they were not far away, and one could walk most of the distance beside the cool-looking river, with trees here and there along on the road for shade.

“Come!” said Vanina, “you surely are not afraid to venture so short a distance. There is no one to be seen, and you have guards here who can keep watch and give us a signal, should they see anyone in the distance. You are all armed, too. Are you afraid—of—of—of what? Ghosts? Ghosts in the sunlight?”

And she laughed.

“Sister, dear,” said Idelia gently, “I have always heard that, in some places, there are evil spirits

abroad in the sunlight, just as much as in the dark. Still, it is not spirits we have to fear. You speak of armed guards here; but not one of them would venture out to those ruins to save his life! And, as for watching and giving us timely alarm, they would be more likely, so soon as we had turned our backs, to rush in and close and bar the gates behind us."

"It is not safe to venture there," said Ombrian, with decision. "See, the haze is growing thicker. The mountain you could see but now has already disappeared. It looks to me as though a sea-mist might come up at any moment, and then—it is not safe. It is likely enough that we have been seen, and our presence here already noted. Our enemies have spies ever on the watch beyond the plain there; and of those who venture out far from here, many disappear; few—very few—return to tell the tale."

"Well," said Vanina resolutely, "one can venture a short distance, at least. Those who care to do so can accompany me, and *those who are afraid* can stay behind."

With these words, in saying which she laid a marked and contemptuous emphasis on the expression, "those who are afraid," she stepped forward, and, passing down the winding path, disappeared from view behind some rocks, before those around her had had time to make up their minds what they ought to do.

Wydale, after the terrible experience that had befallen him in that very place, would have wished to detain her by force, but was unwilling to suggest it. He had seen, and seen with sorrow, that

Vanina had already somewhat changed, and not altogether for the better, since her elevation. True it was, she had not sought it; had, indeed, at first declined it, and had yielded only upon pressure. Nor had she shown any very marked alteration in manner towards him.

But gradually Owen had noticed, first in one little thing, then in others, that she was exhibiting a disposition to play the *rôle* of Queen-ruler of the country very seriously; and was disposed, at times, to show herself imperious and obstinate, and resolute to have her own way. Thus, though in the present instance he had the best of reasons for restraining her, even by force if needs be, he felt, with some bitterness, that to do so would only be to lay himself open to a sharp rebuke, and, possibly, humiliation. Of the others, Dareville had not passed through Wydale's thrilling experience, and did not, therefore, feel strongly enough upon the subject to care to take any action; while Rokta and the others stood still in doubt and hesitation, perplexed and dismayed at Vanina's hasty action.

But George, who, when he saw his sister disappear, had stood and stared after her in fear and alarm too great for words, now suddenly roused himself, and rushed down the path, loudly calling upon her to return. His terror moved Idelia greatly, who looked as though she were about to faint; and Wydale standing beside her, felt afraid to take his eyes off her, thinking every moment she would fall.

Just then Ombrian raised his hand to his brow and gazed fixedly, for a moment or two, across the country.

"See!" he then said, with what was for him unusual animation, "see! I thought so; the mist is coming up. We must all get into shelter. It is not well to be abroad here in the mist."

At these words, Wydale hesitated no longer. Hurriedly he called the attention of his companions to the princess, and followed down the path after Vanina and her brother.

He had scarcely gone, when Idelia, overcome by the hidden fears that oppressed her, fell forward in a swoon.

Prince Rokta caught her in his arms, while Dareville stepped back into the guard-house and called out one of the ladies in attendance. There, to his surprise, he came across Monella, who had just come up, and was asking hurried questions. On hearing Sydney's explanation, he went with him outside, saw that the doctor and others were attending Idelia, and then, addresssing Ombrian, said:

"I will go after the maiden and her brother. Do you all go within and stay there and guard the gate; but keep a good look-out against my return. I fear there is danger; let no one follow me." With that, he snatched his great shield from an attendant, and disappeared down the pathway.

His last words had been spoken in a manner, and accompanied by a look, that impressed those around him with the conviction that he must be implicitly obeyed; and the two young men, who had already started to follow him, now hesitated. Ombrian held up his hand.

"See!" he said, "the mist is gathering around. There is no time to be lost. Look to the princess, first.'

Just then Dareville heard a call, and made out Wydale, on a ledge below, half supporting, half carrying George, and went to meet and help him.

The poor lad, remembering his former experience in the same place, and in deadly fear for his sister, was white and frightened-looking, and scarcely able to walk.

"I found him wandering about," Owen explained, "looking for your sister; neither of us could make out which path she had taken, and, while we were searching for her, Monella came down and bid me come back with the boy. He said we were not to fear; he would find your sister and bring her safely back. And in this mist, I fancy he is the only one that can."

The mist had now become so thick that to search further was impossible. Even to get back to the guard-house, near to it as they were, was no easy matter.

"Well, after all," said Dareville, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "there is no great harm in being out in a fog for a while—if—"

"Aye; if"—Owen returned, with a feeling of anxiety he could not disguise, "if there is no flying monster abroad here to-day. But, if there is, then God help our dear friend alone out there, if Monella fail to find her. And even if he do, heaven only knows how they may fare."

Hearing Wydale speak thus, Dareville, so soon as they had reached the guard-house, where all had now assembled—except Idelia and her attendants, who were in an inner chamber—urged first that a search-party should be sent out, offering to lead it; then,

that something should be done by shouting, or other signals, to assist the two outside to find their way back. But Ombrian only shook his head, and closed the gates.

"It is all useless, sir," he declared. "I have my orders and must obey them ; besides, not one of my men could be induced to go out in this mist ; and for you, as strangers, to go alone, is but madness. If there should be the danger we fear, there is only one man who may hope to face it and live through it ; and that is he who has already gone in search of the princess, your sister.'

Dareville was about to make reply, when a strange, unearthly, rushing sound was heard, and the words died upon his lips. For that had come to pass which those who knew the foundation for their fears had dreaded. The others also heard the sound, and those who heard it for the first time opened their eyes and listened in alarm. Wydale and George both recognised it too well. They had heard it before in the mist, hard by that very place.

But none spoke ; none, indeed, could speak ; for now had supervened a foetid odour of such intensity that the senses reeled and succumbed to its loathsome power. All present fought strenuously against its deadly influence, but in vain ; one after another yielded to a sort of physical paralysis. Looking back, afterwards, none could describe exactly the effect produced. They were conscious of a feeling of intolerable disgust—a disgust that grew into horror, as though they felt themselves in the grasp of some diabolical being inimical to man, whose form they could not see.

Dr. Manleth—perhaps the only one there who gave thought at the time to the analysis of his own feelings—afterwards attributed the physical paralysis produced entirely to the extraordinarily powerful and penetrating odour. Be this as it may—whatever the strange power or the secret of its action—there could be no doubt of the effect produced. For here were many strong men, mostly inured to war, men whose bull-dog courage and dashing bravery, in ordinary circumstances, were above suspicion—and among them one cool-headed scientist, entirely sceptical and self-observant—all conquered, rendered *hors de combat* without a blow, and by an enemy they had not yet even seen! It savoured rather of the supernatural, of the fell working of some weird spell of the legendary enchanter, than of a nineteenth century experience.

Meanwhile, the rushing sound came nearer, died away, and then returned. It was like that which might be made by some gigantic bird cleaving the air with great strokes of mighty wings, and circling round, returning again and again in restless, ravenous seeking for prey.

The mist outside grew denser, and the obscurity within the barred gates deeper, for no lamps were usually required in the guard-house by day; and no one there could move or call out to summon one of the guards in the inner chamber to bring a lantern. Indeed, from the cessation of all sound within, it seemed that all were in the same condition.

Suddenly a scream rent the air—a shrill, prolonged, appalling cry that made the blood run cold and the very flesh to creep. It was such a scream as might

have been given by the two Gorgons when they awoke to find Medusa, their terrific sister, lying dead and headless at their side. A cry that was the embodiment of hoarse, stifling rage, of demoniacal fury, of superhuman savageness and hate. Soon came a deeper shadow without the gate, a shadow that was not steady, as of coming night, but flickered and wavered, and was accompanied by intermittent rushes of foul, nauseating air, and the sound of the beats of giant wings. Then some great mass hurled itself with a crash against the bars, seemed to seize them and shake them with a strength and will that threatened every moment to break them down; giving vent, the while, to its blood-curdling screams which, in the confined space, sounded now like a thunderous roar, and reverberated sonorously in the rock-hewn gallery. Finally the apparition disappeared, the swishing of its powerful wings died down, and, for a space, there was a dull, heavy silence.

But this stillness was not of long duration. The rushing sound was heard again, but at some distance, and at the same moment arose a woman's shriek, followed by a confused medley of the sound of blows, smothered exclamations, and, again, the scream. But now a faint refreshing breeze was wafted in through the barred doors, and the mist began to clear away even more quickly than it had risen. The wind that now came sweeping through the galleries increased in force, bringing relief to the unfortunate occupants of the guard-house. Slowly the blood began to flow more freely in their veins; one by one they stretched their arms, yawned, as though just awakened from sleep, and inhaled deep draughts of the pure air that

called them back to life, and restored energy to their stiffened muscles. Then each one, as he gazed around, glanced sheepishly at his companions, fearing looks of reproach or of contempt. But none could throw a stone against his fellow ; all had succumbed alike to the insidious, baneful stench.

Then, amid an awkward silence, a call was heard from outside, and Monella appeared, blood-stained and dishevelled, bearing in his arms the unconscious figure of Vanina.

CHAPTER XV.

VANINA'S RESCUE.

MONELLA carried his charge into the inner chamber, and delivered her to the attendants of Idelia. Attached to the guard-house were living apartments occupied by the officers on duty for the time being, and their wives. It was into one of these rooms that Idelia had been taken, and she was only just recovering when Vanina was brought in. At once forgetting her own weakness, she insisted upon aiding in the restoration of her guest, and under her gentle ministrations Vanina slowly revived. Outside, meanwhile, Monella briefly explained matters to the anxious inquirers who thronged round him, all talking at once in their eagerness to know what had happened. But his first explanation was somewhat brief, and left much of the curiosity of his questioners unsatisfied.

"The maiden is unharmed; she has only fainted. I also am unhurt save for a few scratches, which, with your permission, friends, I will now bathe in yonder stream."

All sorts of questions and remarks ensued. "But you have fought the Kralen?" "What was the result?" "Have you killed it?" "The first man that has ever been attacked and come back alive!" These and other exclamations of curiosity and as-



Monella carried his charge into the inner chamber.

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tonishment resounded upon all sides, the while that Monella calmly strode across to a stream that fell from the rocks not far away, and there proceeded to wash, and, with the assistance of the doctor, to bind up his wounds. An attendant brought a bowl and linen cloths; and into the former Monella put a few dried leaves or herbs, taken from a wallet he always carried with him. These he bruised and mashed in water, then with the liquid bathed the places that had been bleeding, dipping into it also the linen with which he bound them up.

They may have been, as he declared, "only scratches," but some had a very ugly look, and seemed to be pretty deep. From the right shoulder every vestige of clothing and armour had been rent away, and it looked as though great talons had seized upon both arm and shoulder in more places than one. His helmet had been torn off, and his face was bleeding. But most eloquent of all was the scene of the combat when, a little later, his friends inspected it. For the air was now clear, and the sun was shining brightly, though near to setting; there was, therefore, no further danger to be apprehended from their uncanny enemy, which was never abroad, save in either darkness or thick mist.

When they came to the place of the encounter, one picked up Monella's shield, another his great sword, and the third the massive axe he carried in his belt. All bore marks of the contest; both sword and axe were notched, while from the shield pieces were broken away, as though by vicious bites from powerful jaws. The ground and herbage round about were trampled, and in places torn up and marked with

scores. But nowhere was there any blood or other token that their enemy had been wounded in the fight. While examining his battered helmet, and endeavouring to adjust what had been bent and twisted, Monella, further pressed, now gave the following account of what had happened:—

“I heard the maiden’s cry, and it brought me to her; for she was then not far away. And I was only just in time, for the Kralen was already hovering over her as she lay helpless on the ground, and slowly sinking through the air to seize her. I could but dimly see the creature through the mist; but its dark mass made a deeper shadow overhead, and the constant motion of the wings stirred the foliage around and blew about the maiden’s hair. The movements of the monster were deliberate; it seemed in no way hurried, but hovered as though it felt sure of its prey, and was gloating over it in advance. So does the ichneumon fly hovering over the wretched victim in which it is about to plant the cruel sting that does not kill at once, but consigns to a long, slow agony, and a terrible death. I stood over the maiden and waited till the creature came well within reach, when I struck at it again and again with my sword, but altogether uselessly. The weapon glanced off from its skin as though it were covered with hard scales; and it was much the same when I struck at the wings. But they were in such constant motion, and the light was so bad, it was impossible to get a fair blow in. So I did my best to injure the wings for flight, by tearing rents in their membranous covering with my sword; but with no effect that I could see, and, while I was thus striking at the wings, I was

more or less exposed to attacks from the furious monster's teeth and talons. When I fended these off with the shield, it seized it in its jaws, and shook it as a dog shakes a rat, nearly wrenching it from my grasp, and actually tearing pieces from its edge. Meanwhile, its claws would strike savagely at my body, and landed more than once on my arm and shoulder. They even caught my helmet, and tore it from my head. After a space I began to realise that my sword was useless; that it was a fight in which strength and heavy blows alone would serve. So I threw away the weapon and attacked the beast violently with the axe. Twice did I beat it down to the ground with the rain of blows I showered upon it, and, while there, it tore viciously at the sand and herbage with its claws. But when I would try to rush in to end the fight, a wing would strike me in the face, and for a moment or two obscure my sight, and in that time the beast would recover itself, mount in the air, and come at me again with a rush."

Here Monella paused, and then went on slowly, with a grave shake of the head:

"How it would have ended, had the mist not lifted, I cannot tell you. I fear I should have fared badly; and, if so, then the maiden!—but that is too terrible to think of. By God's providence the fog began to clear; and, as it grew lighter, the effect was marked on my antagonist. I perceived that it was dazed by the growing light, its rushes were now so badly aimed that by merely jumping aside it was easy to avoid them. Evidently the creature, whatever may be its status in the scheme of nature, is one to which light is insupportable—intolerably painful.

It can live only in gloom and darkness, or in the semi-obscurity of mist and fog. As the air grew lighter still, the brute gave one final scream, full of baffled rage and spite, and flew off through the mist. I waited a short time to make sure it would not return; then I lifted the maiden in my arms and carried her up the path."

This short and simple narrative of what must have been a terrible encounter was told in a manner so modest and unassuming that it might have been supposed the narrator was merely describing a tussle with a savage dog. And the quiet acknowledgment at the end, that the hero of it could not say "how it would have ended" if the mist had not fortunately cleared, deeply impressed his hearers with a sense of their narrow escape from an awful tragedy.

Presently Wydale spoke.

"There is one thing you haven't explained to us: how is it you were not overcome by the paralysing influence of that awful stench that rendered us powerless even to move?"

Monella smiled, and drew something from his wallet.

"This is the secret," he replied. "Nothing very wonderful. Amongst the odds and ends in the cargo of the *Saucy Fan* I found some samples of this little contrivance. It is a sort of respirator-mask, so contrived that it fits over mouth and nose, and contains a little chamber in which can be placed cotton wool or tow saturated with chemicals. Now, for a long time past, I have been experimenting with a substance which I conceived might counteract the deadly effluvium which I knew was given off by the Kralen,

and which overcomes the senses of those inhaling it. I believed I had discovered the antidote, but had failed to find or make a suitable medium for its application, till this little contrivance came into my hands. I gather that it is a recent invention of a scientist to enable firemen to enter buildings filled with smoke. It was just what I had been wanting, and I resolved to try it on the first occasion."

Dr. Manleth took the respirator, and examined it.

"And now tell me," then he said, "what *is* this creature like? It seems to me it must be a kind of gigantic bat. If ever I heard a bat's scream, I heard it to-day in the cry of this beast—only magnified a thousand times."

"I think you must be near the truth," Monella answered, "and yet there was much in the creature that resembled rather a flying reptile than a warm-blooded animal, such as a bat. Bats, too, have not scales, as this gruesome brute seemed to have; I only say *seemed*—I could not see clearly."

"Just so. Still we know," Manleth went on, "that there are vampire-bats; and I may say that bats generally are about as hideous, and many species as savage and bloodthirsty, as any created beings. They are evil-smelling, too, to a degree, and fly abroad only in the dark or gloom; they cannot bear the light. It seems to me that, if we suppose some hitherto unknown species of colossal bats, the mystery is, in part, explained. There would still remain, however, the puzzle of its paralysing scent. It is almost on a par with the power of fascination, which legend formerly attributed to serpents."

"I see nothing in it that cannot be explained on

quasi-scientific grounds," rejoined Monella. "There is scarcely any limit to be placed upon the diffusive power of scents. A millionth part of a grain of musk will make its presence known to the organs of smell, and it will affect a hundred persons simultaneously. But that, after all, may be nothing to the power of divisibility of other odours with which we are unacquainted. It may be possible to produce upon human beings, through the sense of smell alone, effects at which science, in our present state of knowledge, cannot even guess."

To this proposition the doctor could find no sound objection, especially since his late experience; and he turned and walked on in silence, as the party wended its way back to the guard-house.

"You have not told us, by the way," the doctor presently again observed, "how it happened that you came upon the scene so opportunely."

"There were two reasons. First, the approaching mist had been seen and signalled by our watchmen; and, feeling a little anxious, I came hither to warn you not to venture outside. Next, I had had notice of an attack to be made to-night on the barge *Princess Idelia*, on its return. I have altered the arrangements, therefore."

"Attack! An attack to be made on the barge!" cried Wydale. "Then we are now likely to see some fighting?"

"I have information," rejoined Monella, with a trace of sadness, "that our enemies are rousing up. I fear we are now at the commencement of another term of warlike operations. If so, we must do the best we can; but it is a prospect that I cannot

view without regret, for I love not war and bloodshed."

"And yet," observed the doctor, in an undertone to Wydale, as Monella walked thoughtfully on in front of them, "he is a man whom nature surely intended for a warrior, and not a soldier merely, but a soldier-king, for he is a born leader of men; and, as for courage—well you will remember what I have told you before—and—we have all had a further example to-day. But it is true, all the same, that though he fights like a lion when in the thick of battle, he always goes into it with sadness and reluctance. I am quite convinced that warfare is abhorrent to him; but you would never think so, if you saw him in the midst of it."

"I like him none the less for that," said Wydale.

"Just so. And there's something else; when once the battle is concluded, no one is more ready and willing to help the wounded—even of our enemies. And," continued the doctor, in half-humorous perplexity, "I am compelled to admit that he often proves himself a better doctor than myself. His knowledge of herbs is great. He spends much time, at intervals, in searching for them, and drying and preparing them, and the wounds he treats with them heal in a fashion sometimes marvellous."

"And how were these signals given that warned him of coming fog?"

"By the heliograph. There is heliographic signalling apparatus at the various watch-towers along our line of coast, and the signallers are in constant communication with each other. Do you understand heliographic signalling?"

"Yes; it is employed continually in our little wars in Africa."

When they reached the guard-house they found the whole party standing at its entrance. Vanina, still pale, advanced quickly towards Monella.

"How can I ever thank you for your timely aid?" she exclaimed, seizing his hand.

But Idelia came forward too, and took his other hand.

"Nay, it is for me to thank the Lord, Monella," she declared, with a smile and manner full of grace and sweetness, though her face was wan, and she was trembling still. "He has preserved to *me* my dear sister; to our nation, their future queen. In my own name, and in the name of our people, I thank him." Then she gave a cry at the sight of his bandaged arm; and turned even paler than before.

Monella was not one given to laughing. His nearest approach to it was a smile. To-day, however, for a wonder, he laughed almost merrily at Idelia's expression of concern.

"Of a truth, princess," he said, "I am not hurt; and, if I were, I believe we have done a piece of work this day well worth a little pain. Look around over this fair landscape, over yonder ruins of a once noble, happy city! All depopulated, desolated, turned into a tangled wilderness, by your enemies, aided by unholy alliances with unnatural monsters! To-day hath witnessed the first stand against their foul ally. God helping us, it shall not be the last; but the beginning, rather, of the end. I shall not be content until I see your people restored to their ancient homes, and yonder fertile country smiling again

with golden harvests and blossoming and fruitful gardens."

A smile that was half glad, half frightened, lighted up Idelia's face ; then it vanished, and, raising her eyes solemnly to heaven, she replied :

"I can only say 'Amen' to that, dear friend. But how came you by your wounds? You have told us nothing yet of that ; we are anxious to hear all about your wondrous fight."

Then ensued much talk, and many more questions had to be answered and explanations given. The relics of the combat, the notched sword, the broken shield, the battered helmet, were handled and examined by each in turn, amid exclamations of mingled wonder and dismay.

"These must be preserved," Idelia said at last, "as national mementoes of to-day's achievement. And now we would fain return. We have seen enough to-day of this side of the water."

"That cannot be yet, princess," Monella answered to her surprise. And, in response to her inquiring look, went on, "There is trouble abroad this evening. You must wait on this side for a while until I have completed my arrangements. Then you may cross, I trust, in safety. Meantime there is much still to be seen in our underground domains likely to amuse and interest our friends."

CHAPTER XVI.

A NIGHT SURPRISE.

THE series of caverns, grottoes, and underground galleries, called by the inhabitants by the general term, "caverns" or "grottoes," comprised not merely a town or community in itself, but far more. It was an arsenal, a dockyard, a fortress, an impregnable citadel or rocky fastness, and a manufacturing town. It had its workshops, its places of worship, its stores of arms and armour, its museums, its palace, and its marvellous "Grotto of a Thousand Lights," and other underground gardens and resorts. Its rocky passages, running backwards and forwards, often two or three, one over the other, extended several miles. How many miles no one seemed to know, any more than any could tell when, or by whom, the structures had been made. Undoubtedly, they represented the untiring toil of multitudes of workers, carried on through countless generations with that persistence and stolid disregard alike of time and obstacles that form to-day our chief cause of wonder in contemplating certain ancient works—whether the rock-hewn temples and tombs of India, the pyramids of Egypt, or the mysterious "earthworks" of America. Amongst much that is conjectural, one fact stands out clearly enough about all these monuments of past ages ; the

workpeople employed upon them must have been reckoned—first and last—by hundreds of thousands, perhaps by millions; guided by a knowledge and skill sufficient to excite the wonder and admiration, and rival the ability of our greatest modern engineers, all the marvellous discoveries and appliances of modern science, notwithstanding.

Hence it was that Monella found no difficulty in amusing and interesting his visitors, until the time arrived when he deemed it safe for them to attempt the crossing back to the harbour. His “visitors,” they might all appropriately be termed, since the “caverns” were essentially his particular domain. Throughout the period during which he had been “a sojourner in the land,” he had made this curious retreat especially his own. There he had gradually gathered to himself everything he deemed essential to the government of the country and the supplying of its naval and military needs. There he passed most of his time, so much that many wondered how he occupied himself; the more so that, when there, he was invisible to all but a select few, who, whatever they knew, or did not know, gave no hint concerning it. As to this, there were many different theories amongst the people. Some believed that Monella regarded the outcome of the struggle then going on with doubt, and that he was making every possible preparation to fit the “caverns,” in case of need, for a last retreating place, from which they could issue forth and harry the enemy, should he succeed in capturing their city and harbour. Others opined that he had discovered a mine of gold or precious stones, and was carrying on secret mining operations,

and so on. But, though he did not give his confidence to many, there were very few who grumbled, or grudged him the right to act as he thought best. He had shown in a thousand ways his unselfish devotion to their cause. He was always "on hand" when wanted, ever ready to fight for them; certainly, therefore, he had earned the right to spend his spare time how he pleased. Gralda, their High Priest and Astrologer Royal, spent *his* spare time in an observatory gazing at the stars; why should not Monella, if it so pleased him, bury himself at times in the "caverns," gazing, maybe, down into the earth? So the people had grown used to it, and ceased to wonder.

It was nearly two hours after sunset when the state-barge, *Princess Idelia*, issued from the dark portals of the tunnel entrance to the caverns. In front of her rowed two light war vessels, as on their previous trip, and behind her, at some distance, came two more. The barge carried only two large lanterns, and they threw the light in such manner on to the upper deck as to show that there was no one on it. From the grand saloon below came sounds of voices and laughter, and from the port-windows beams of ruddy light. Below this again was another deck, where many rowers, lightly clad and armed, stolidly plied their long, heavy oars. In the phosphorescent waters no vessel could move at night without marking its course, every dip of its oars creating trails of light; and for this reason, apart from the lanterns carried by the various craft, it was easy enough to see the procession from afar, though there was no moon and the night was dark.

Slowly, with monotonous lift and dip of the oars, the train of boats moved on, until about half-way across, they passed several vessels lying dark and shadowy on the water. These carried no lanterns; and so still was the surface of the sea, that no little wavelets even plashed against their sides to mark their position by their faint gleams.

Suddenly, just when the *Princess Idelia* came opposite to these dark shapes, the light shining through the port-windows of her saloon, and the sounds of laughter and of song floating from them out on the still night air, the space round the strange craft broke into sparkles of light, as oars dipped quickly into the water and brought their vessels alongside the barge. Silently, but swiftly, they closed round the bows and stern and made fast; then a minute later, crowds of heavily-armed men climbed up on to her deserted deck, and rushed to the stairways to make their way to the saloon. But the hatchways were all closed, and resisted for some time their efforts to break them open with their axes. Meantime, the two vessels that had preceded the barge put out their lights, and one rowed rapidly away into the darkness, while the other remained motionless and almost invisible. And the escort astern, instead of going to the assistance of the barge, turned and made off also.

The lights in the saloon and underdeck of the barge had died away, and below a strange silence had ensued. Only the noise of the hammerings of the assailants on the hatchways, and their savage curses at the delay in breaking them open could be heard, mingled at times with mysterious splashing in the water round about. At last the hatchways were

forced open, and the triumphant assailants rushed tumultuously down the stairways only to find—no one! Not a soul was to be seen; not one of the merry party whose laughter and song had been heard so plainly but a few minutes before. Astonished, the intruders rushed down to the lower deck, only to find that even the rowers had disappeared, and—most surprising of all—had even taken their oars with them!

Then there arose a tumult in the galleys the assailants had just left, and the latter rushed back on deck; they were too late. Their own vessels were in the hands of their enemies, the fastening ropes had been cut, and the galleys were now rowing away from them as hard as they could go.

Bewildered, amazed, maddened with rage, the three score men, who had boarded so triumphantly, stood about the barge in helpless fury. Without oars they were powerless to move the vessel so much as a single yard; and so they hung about her deck, some cursing and swearing, some quarrelling and indulging in mutual recrimination, some shouting to supposed friends in the distance to come to their aid; while others stared blankly out into the darkness, awaiting dejectedly developments. But they had not long to wait. The black shadowy boat lying silent and dark in front of them was joined by first one, and then another, till there were many, all equally dark and shadowy and silent. Nothing could be seen of them save the ripples of light upon the water; nothing could be guessed by the anxious watchers on the barge as to what these craft might be, or what their object. They could not even tell whether they were friends

or foes. If the former, why did they not shout, and so declare themselves? If the latter, why did they hesitate to attack them in their present almost defenceless plight? Why did they not pour in broadsides of javelins and arrows?

But their suspense was not of long duration; the explanation of the riddle came when sounds were heard from the strange vessels as of much splashing of oars, and streaks and little showers of light appeared in many places at once, and the *Princess Idelia* began to move. Slowly, at first, but gradually increasing in speed, the barge forged ahead under the irresistible invitation of a dozen galleys with two or three score of stout rowers pulling at their oars, each galley attached to one or other of several stout hawsers that were fastened to the barge. Soon—very soon—the half-hundred or so of fierce warriors in the latter awoke to the almost incredible fact that they were being ignominiously towed, helpless and unresisting, straight into the harbour of their enemies, where in face of the odds they would have against them, fighting or resistance would, of course, be futile.

Then went up a howl of beast-like rage, as the unfortunates realised the situation. A few who had bows and arrows shot wildly in the direction of the rowers, but in the darkness they could see nothing at which to aim, and the arrows did no one any harm. Nor were there many of them, since the majority of the attacking party had left them behind, knowing they would be of little use at close quarters on the deck of the barge. Others, more sensibly, rushed down to cut the cables by which they were being towed, and, deeming the work easy enough, gave a

crow of satisfaction at their own cleverness in thinking of it. But they soon found that the hawsers were attached to the bottom of the barge, far out of the reach of their swords or axes. Then good swimmers threw off their armour, and, each taking a sharp knife or dagger between his teeth, they plunged overboard and dived down to the hawsers, at which they cut and slashed as long as they could stay beneath the surface. But, to their astonishment, it was all in vain. The hawsers—there were more than one—as they soon discovered—though not very large, easily resisted all their efforts, and they only notched or broke their weapons. Again and again was this essayed, till, at last, the divers came up disheartened, crying, “Witchcraft! Witchcraft!” What had happened to their ignorant minds seemed a wonderful thing; but the simple explanation was that Monella, foreseeing this move, had taken the precaution to use some steel hawsers he had found amongst the cargo of the *Saucy Fan*.

As to the rest, the matter had been managed simply enough. The barge had carried, instead of the party who had crossed in her in the morning, a large number of men, all good swimmers, very lightly dressed, and armed only with short, sharp swords. These had been instructed in their parts, and imitated, sufficiently well, the songs and laughter of a careless, festive party returning home, unconscious of lurking foes around. No sooner, however, had the armed men in the hostile boats climbed up on to the deck of the barge, than the whole of her passengers, including the rowers, slipped noiselessly overboard, taking with them all the oars. Partly supported by these, they

waited about while two or three expert divers managed to cut the lines by which the enemy's galleys were fastened, and the latter then partly drifted, and were partly pushed, little by little, farther and farther from the barge. All the armed men were now on her deck making an uproar in their endeavours to force the hatchways; and the only persons left in their galleys were the rowers, mostly unarmed, who sat watching their friends, too much pre-occupied to notice an occasional light swirl in the water round about them. Suddenly, on every side, men appeared who swarmed up over the bulwarks, and, one standing beside each rower holding a sword to his throat, ordered him to begin to row. The surprise was complete; the enemies' boats were thus captured and rowed away by their own people, while the headstrong fighting men they had brought were busy capturing a deserted barge.

Then other vessels, full of armed men, came up and chased away the two or three galleys of the enemy that had been left around as scouts; and finally, instead of troubling about the enraged foes, the barge was taken in tow, as has been described. But, perhaps, the most exasperating part of it all, to these captured ones, was the discovery—presently made—that it was their own galleys and their own rowers who, under compulsion, were towing them thus ingloriously into the enemy's port. When, therefore, they had shot their arrows in the dark, they had, in reality, been shooting at their own friends as well as at the foes who were compelling them to row.

And thus the discomfited warriors eventually

reached the harbour. Here were lights, blazing lamps, braziers, flaring torches, and, on all sides, ranks of armed men, and archers with bows ready bent, and arrows aimed at the crowd on the deck of the barge; while upon the walls and towers, and over the archway, others held spears and javelins poised ready to hurl down upon them. The rowers then ceased their work, and the barge brought up alongside a quay.

Around the landing place, in a semi-circle, were drawn up a treble line of guards, and in the centre, at some little distance, could be seen a group that included, among many others, all those who had that day formed the party at the caverns. In the middle were Vanina and her brothers, and Idelia, the last shrinking back when the barge drew near. Beside these were Rokta, Ombrian, and other chiefs; while Monella's towering form was conspicuous standing a little aside in converse with Wydale and Dr. Manleth. When the barge came to a standstill, there was a great shout from the spectators, at which Monella advanced to the front and raised his hand for silence. He carried no arms; only on his left arm was a small buckler of leather and bronze. Ombrian and others stood behind him at a little distance. Standing within some thirty yards of the side of the barge, Monella now addressed the crest-fallen Karanites.

Manleth interpreted to Wydale, in a low tone, what followed.

"Men of Karandis," he called out to them, in a sonorous, ringing voice that even those farthest away could plainly hear, "we grant you your lives and

gentle treatment. Lay down your arms; surrender and fear nothing."

For answer, a rough-looking soldier on the deck hurled a spear with such deadly aim that it would have gone through the speaker's throat had it not been parried. But Monella deftly threw it aside with a quick movement of the buckler on his arm, and, when a great and savage howl arose from those surrounding him, again raised a hand for silence. He made no other movement, and showed no sign of anger. Only his eyes flashed, and, when he next spoke, his voice was stern and masterful.

"Men of Karandis," he said again, pointing now to the man who had thrown the weapon, "bind that man, and bring him to me! Ye all know ye can trust my promise, and that resistance is worse than useless. Ye know, too, how differently your king treats any prisoners he may capture from us. I call on you to throw down your arms!"

For a space, those on board stared defiantly at Monella. A few more spears were even raised in air, and were about to be launched, when Monella turned his glance upon their holders, and, before that dauntless look, even the most militant dropped, first their eyes, and then their weapons.

Few even amongst that rough crowd seemed to care to endure and return Monella's glance. Either they would look down, or turn away, the while that some seized upon the man who had thrown the spear, bound him, and pushed him forward to the front.

"'Tis well," Monella said. "Once more, I say, throw down your arms; ye have my promise, and we want no senseless butchery here."

This time there followed a rattle on the deck, as every man obeyed, and cast his weapons from him. Monella nodded, and signed to some of the guards around to board the barge and bind the captives. Then, with a word to Ombrian, bidding him see that they were not ill-treated, he turned and walked away, heedless of the shouts and cries which greeted him, and rang again and again through the crisp night air.

A little later the captured warriors defiled in batches before Vanina, to whom Ombrian cried :

“Princess! future Queen of Atlantis! Behold your earliest captives! May this result of the first fight since your arrival prove an omen of the victories in store for us!”

And all the populace shouted themselves hoarse in frantic demonstrations of approval.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS.”

AFTER the events recorded in the last chapter, Monella's influence amongst the people became more marked than ever. He no longer had cause to complain of want of spirit or of patriotism. So far from that, he was almost mobbed, as he passed to and fro, by aspirants to military employment who begged and entreated to be allowed to enrol themselves under his command. Had all who offered been accepted, none would have been left to carry on the agricultural and other necessary work of the community. Even amongst the last batch of prisoners, a large proportion sent in a humble prayer to be allowed to serve under the man who had so cleverly entrapped them. And, since they were a source of embarrassment to their captors, Monella thought proper to accede, to some extent, to the request. He had them paraded before him, and, passing down their ranks, scanning them with his penetrating glance, he pointed to one here and one there, and so selected about three-fourths of their number. The others he would not trust, and ordered them to be closely confined and carefully watched. And it was afterwards a matter of common knowledge that no one of those he thus picked out belied his judgment.

Needless to say, a great impetus was given to drill and warlike exercises and manœuvres. Emulation ran high between the several companies of the soldiers and their officers; and every day witnessed assaults of arms, whereat the members of the various troops competed for prizes and other honours. Dareville and Wydale were foremost, both in coaching and training those placed under them, and meeting all-comers in friendly rivalry. Even the youths and boys were bitten with the warlike fever, and formed a corps of cadets, of which George was made one of the chiefs. So perseveringly, indeed, did he take to his new duties, that he speedily became one of the most expert among them in the use of the bow and arrow, and in single-stick and other exercises. And it was inspiring to see his sister's pride when he proved himself the victor in competition with other boys of his own age.

Meantime, Monella's presage that a fresh era of warlike operations had set in, proved well founded. Almost every day the enemy made demonstrations in one direction or another. The part known as the caverns being unassailable, and the harbour and its defences almost equally so, the Karanites divided their attention between attempts to surprise and capture isolated boats, and landing parties at various points on the shores of the island in the hope of finding a weak spot in which they could establish themselves, as a base for fresh incursions. In the encounters that ensued, there were many stubborn fights; and at times two or three would be going on simultaneously at different points along the shore line. And though in every instance the invaders

were eventually driven off, the victories were by no means bloodless, as in the case of that which had opened the campaign. On the contrary, many of them were sanguinary and ferocious in the extreme. Many fell on both sides, and still more were wounded. Among the latter were nearly all the leaders, including Monella, Rokta, Dareville and Wydale, and, curiously enough in every case, the wounds were received in protecting Vanina, who insisted upon joining in the conflicts, and herself encouraging the soldiers. Clad in helmet and breastplate, or light chain armour, she went about amongst the ranks, now inspiring the fighters, anon kneeling beside the wounded to help bind up their hurts, and speak words of comfort or of praise and thanks for their devotion.

Small wonder that she speedily became almost idolised by the soldiers, or that they were soon imbued with a deep conviction that Heaven had indeed sent them a warrior-queen to lead them on to victory. Sometimes, in the very height of the fray she would catch Wydale's eye fixed upon her with a perplexed, inquiring look, whereat she would toss her head, her eyes would flash, and her lips curl into a smile in which a certain haughtiness and half-defiance were mingled with a flush, that showed she was not indifferent to the criticism his glance revealed. To Owen, at this period, her conduct was not only a constant puzzle but a source of pain; for, while he saw much he could not help admiring, he was also conscious of a gradual change in her demeanour towards him which filled him with foreboding.

In her enthusiasm, Vanina frequently exposed herself to danger with a recklessness which was

perilous not only to herself, but to those around her who were ever watchful to defend her. In this Rokta and Wydale vied with her own brother and with each other; and each, in turn, as stated, was wounded, and compelled, for a while, to retire temporarily from the field. And, since they were not the only ones who owed their wounds to shielding her, Monella found himself at last compelled to interfere to put some restrictions on her actions. More than once, indeed, he himself had been constrained to rush into the thick of a hard-fought scrimmage and lay about him with his great sword or heavy axe to rescue officers, whose peril had been brought about by Vanina's rash though well-intentioned zeal. After that he decided that in future she must refrain from active participation in the fighting.

So the edict went forth, and henceforward Vanina had to content herself with watching "the battle from afar"; afterwards calling for those who had specially distinguished themselves, that she might praise and befittingly reward them. It was remarked with wonder that she herself had escaped without a scratch, for amongst their foes were many of savage instincts who would as soon have slain a woman as a man. Sooner, probably, in her case, in that they looked upon her as a witch. It was even said that some had sworn to give their lives to "kill the witch," believing that victory would not smile upon their side so long as she was alive to encourage her soldiers and support them with her sorceries.

Some two months passed in this desultory warfare, which at last became harassing and exhausting to all concerned. In the main the result was decidedly in

favour of Monella's troops, thanks greatly to his generalship. As in the night surprise, with which the campaign had opened, he constantly gained the day by his strategy and resourcefulness. No matter what were the circumstances, he seemed ever ready with some new ruse to play off upon his opponents. One day, in feigned retreat, he led them into a quicksand that lay near the seashore, where their heavy armour quickly sank many of them beyond the help of those of their fellows who had stopped in time upon its brink. He built an outlying fort or block-house in an isolated spot beyond the fortifications, and put into it a garrison and stores. Soon the Karanites laid siege to it ; then another troop of the Dilandians, as Monella's men were called, attacked the besiegers ; but only to be driven off and chased. But when the Karanites returned from their pursuit, they found the garrison had slipped away in their absence. Thereupon they entered and took possession, and, finding good stores of wine and food, made preparations for a permanent stay, as a base for future operations. They sent for reinforcements, and more and more men crowded in ; then the whole building fell with a mighty crash, burying three-fourths of them in its ruins ; while the few who struggled out of the wreckage were set upon by their watchful foes, and killed or taken prisoners. For at the time of the building of the structure it had been undermined ; and when the garrison went out of it, they left it upheld only by temporary supports hidden under the ostensible foundations ; and these gave way under the increased weight of a more numerous garrison. On another occasion, when a

party of Karanites, having effected a landing, were engaged with an equal number of Dilandians, in a fight which lasted for some time without advantage to either side, a number of Karanite boats were seen in the distance apparently with reinforcements. At that the Dilandians withdrew, pursued closely by their foes, who followed them some distance inland. But when the latter returned to the shore, after another profitless chase, they found their own vessels in the hands of Dilandians; for the supposed reinforcements had been one more of Monella's stratagems. He had utilised the vessels he had previously taken, and despatched them to the spot by a circuitous route, flying their own captured banners, and filled with Dilandians dressed in the purple uniforms stripped from captured prisoners. In this affair again, a considerable number of both galleys and men were taken with but trifling loss to the Dilandians.

In these and other ways Monella gained numerous small victories, until at last his enemies became either too wary or too much discouraged to trust themselves in further forays. And for a while there was again an informal truce or lull in the hostilities.

So far, Monella's policy had been almost wholly a defensive one; he had contented himself with keeping open communication between the caverns and Dilandis, and repulsing descents upon the line of coast. There were very few engagements on the water, and nothing was seen of the great armada. He had, however, utilised the time in preparing for a grand counter-attack, and he decided that the moment was now near when he could assume the offensive, and carry the war into the enemy's country

with some prospect of success. The lull that ensued was, therefore, but the calm before another storm, and over the city of Dilandis there came a sort of hush of expectation. For, though Monella's plans were known only to himself and the two or three who were in his confidence, yet it was a matter of common knowledge that some kind of decisive stroke was about to be attempted.

Some there were who were disposed to think that Monella had too long delayed offensive action. They were all thereby, they objected, subject to constant harassing attacks, while their foes passed the time at home in peace, free from alarms, or raids, or invasion. Then again, there was little if any fish to be obtained, for no fisherman could venture far from the shore; and the Dilandians trusted in great part to fish for their food supply. These and many other trials and inconveniences were added to the hardships and suffering that fighting always must entail; and, after a time, they had induced some grumbling. Moreover, many, no doubt, were disappointed at finding that no particular advantage in the way of fighting had accrued from the many wonderful things that—as they had been told—had been brought in the “big ship” the strangers had arrived in.

As to this, even Wydale and Dareville sometimes wondered what use Monella proposed to make of some of the articles they had brought amongst the cargo of the *Saucy Fan*. There were the fireworks, the steam launch, the small cannon, the rockets, and so on; no use had been made of any of these. So far as their own revolvers were concerned, they had reserved their small supply of cartridges for grave

emergencies. Only a few times had they brought their pistols into use, and then it had been to save their own or some other's lives; but then the effect on the enemy had been instantaneous and remarkable. On two or three occasions the use of the weapons had turned the tide of battle when it had been going against them, and sent their foes off in headlong panic just when they had deemed themselves sure of victory. The moral effects, too, were considerable, and in the end caused both the new-comers to be regarded by the other side with an almost superstitious dread. But the two, on their part, only longed the more for two or three rifles and a few hundred cartridges; for then, as they were never tired of saying, "the whole business could be ended, and King Kara brought to his knees in a jiffy," whatever that period of time might precisely be.

One thing much surprised them in this connection; they heard nothing of Durford and his companions; and they frequently wondered what could have become of them and of the rifles and other arms they had carried off from the *Saucy Fan*.

As to social matters, all had made good progress in the language of the country; and come to know, and form friendships with, many of the inhabitants. Their relative positions, however, had very considerably altered—at least as regarded Wydale. For between Vanina and Prince Rokta a close friendship had sprung up—one that seemed daily to grow closer, while the relations between her and Owen became proportionately colder. In Vanina's frequent intercourse with the army or the hospitals, Prince Rokta was ever her principal companion. She con-

ferred with him upon all matters in connection with the operations in which she took an interest, so that they were constantly to be seen together. Wydale, as a consequence, seemed to grow more and more moody and discontented. Indeed he was in worse case than that; for he was a prey to contending passions, and had to chew, as best he could, the cud of bitter disappointment. He had, from the first, fallen deeply in love with Vanina; and, up to the time of their arrival in the place, had had every reason to feel hopeful. But now she seemed to have no further thought for him. Whether it was that her head had been turned by the position into which she had so unexpectedly been thrown, or that she had been smitten by Rokta's undeniably handsome face and figure, and his singularly graceful manner, Wydale could not decide. He knew only that she had altered, and that his chances of ever winning her seemed to be daily lessening even to vanishing point. It was in vain he tried to console himself with the reflection that she was a heartless flirt, and therefore unworthy of a true man's love. The reflection did not help him to repress his passion. And to do so was rendered ever more difficult by the fact that in all other respects he was constrained to admit that he admired her more than ever. She had proved herself, in actual warfare, to be possessed of all those characteristics that he had dreamily attributed to her, in fancy, long before. Had he not said that she seemed born to be a Warrior-Queen, one to lead men into battle, and to hearten and encourage them in the thick of the fight with her own rare courage? And had she not justified all this—and had she not

done so, moreover, without losing one jot of her womanly instincts? This had been shown and proved in many ways; by her thoughtful care for the wounded, by her ready sympathy with those dear to them—their wives, or sisters, or children. And at home, at the court receptions, it was strange to see how completely she could throw off the martial air, and become again the fascinating, though ever dignified and queenly woman, winning golden opinions on all sides by her gracious kindness to every one around her. It was at these times, more than at any other, perhaps, that Wydale would be sensible that he loved her more than ever; and feel bitterly resentful towards Rokta, who—as he conceived it—had deserted the beautiful, lovable girl he was engaged to, to enter his (Wydale's) own particular "preserve"; to try to carry off from him one whom he had almost come to consider his own.

Meanwhile Idelia, who shrank from all association with fighting and warfare, save tending the wounded, secluded herself for much of her time in her own apartments. She was even often absent from the evening receptions and other functions; and when she did attend them, everyone noticed that she appeared pale and careworn.

One day the smouldering feud between Prince Rokta and Wydale broke out into an open quarrel.

Wydale, strolling aimlessly through the palace, and having nothing particular just then in the way of military duties to attend to, came across Idelia seated at a balcony that looked out over the city and the sea beyond the island. He was struck

with the sadness that he saw written in her face and attitude ; and, feeling in dismal mood himself, he sat down by her, and asked in a kindly way what was the matter ? ”

Slowly she turned her eyes on him, and asked, in turn :

“Why do you suppose that anything is the matter ? ”

“From your manner, princess, and your face. I have been long enough here to be able to tell when you feel happy, and when distressed. We have all met with so much kindness at your hands that I should be ungrateful indeed, if I did not feel concerned when I see that you are unhappy.”

“Who can be happy,” asked Idelia, “in the midst of so much suffering? For such a long time now every day, every hour almost, brings us fresh affliction, news of the wounding or death of some of our people. I fear now even to look out from the palace, as I used to, over our country, lest I should hear suddenly the outcry and the shouts that tell that men are struggling to maim and kill each other. There is nowhere I can go, unless I shut myself up in some underground vault, to escape from all these troubles.”

“All that I understand,” returned Wydale, with a sigh ; “yet I fancy, princess, it is not the sole cause of your growing melancholy. Affairs were much as they are now before we came ; indeed, they were worse ; for, at least, since we have been here, the position of your people in the warfare has improved.”

“Yes, that is true ; but—I had hoped, you see, that all this would have come to an end before.”

"I know. I would say, however, that I think we are now near the end, and that a little time will see the finish. And yet, princess," Wydale continued, looking at her earnestly, "I fear the cessation of hostilities will not bring back the colour to your cheeks, or the merry laugh to your lips, that so charmed us all when we first came here."

Idelia glanced at him for an instant, but said nothing, and turned her gaze dreamily upon the distant landscape.

"I should be sorry to think, princess," Wydale went on, "that our coming amongst you had brought you trouble instead of the surcease of sorrow you had looked for. I should deem it a misfortune, indeed, if the time should come when you should wish in your heart that you had never seen the *Saucy Fan* and those on board of her."

At this Idelia buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"I don't like to say anything," she sobbed out, "but things seem somehow to be going wrong; and I do not know what to do to put them right. I have no father or mother to advise me, no friend—"

"No friend?" said a voice behind her; and the two looking round, espied Monella, who regarded them intently. "Say not, my daughter, that you have no friend while I am within call."

Idelia brightened up a little and responded:

"I know that, good friend. You must think me ungrateful to seem to have forgotten you, who have done so much for me and all our people. Yet you have so many things to think about, that I should be selfish to weary you with my troubles."

"Why so?" returned Monella, "if you can share them with new-comers?" and he looked at Wydale with so keen a glance that the latter felt embarrassed. "I hope, however," he went on, "that we have better times in store for us; and better times may bring more cheerful thoughts. In any case, keep up your courage, my daughter, and your faith, and all may yet be well." With that he turned and left them.

Wydale, to turn the conversation, took up a more enlivening theme.

"There is quite a refreshing breeze to-day," he said. "What a pity we cannot go for a sail."

Just then Prince Rokta, coming by, stopped when he saw the two together. His brow clouded; he hesitated, as though undecided whether to speak or to pass on. Then suddenly making up his mind, he said, with a laugh that was slightly forced:

"And what are you two discussing with such seriousness?"

Wydale looked at him calmly, and replied:

"The weather."

Rokta flushed up and answered brusquely:

"I think not. People don't commonly discuss the weather in such serious fashion."

"Don't they?" returned Wydale coolly. "Perhaps you know best. But is it of the slightest consequence?" and with that he turned away, affecting to be interested in the view before him.

Rokta started, took a step forward, then swallowing his anger with an effort, walked away without further comment.

During this little episode Idelia had said nothing, and now made no reference to it.

Wydale had some further talk with her, chiefly about the prospects of the expedition Monella was then planning ; but, finding that she was in no mood for conversation, he was on the point of rising to take leave of her, when Rokta returned.

" Still on the weather ? " he asked sarcastically.

" No, indeed," replied Idelia, " not this time. We were discussing our prospects in the coming battle."

" It seems to me," said Rokta, " that this gentleman would do better to be in his place looking after his duties in preparation for that battle, than idling away his time with you."

Wydale sprang up.

" How dare you, sir ? " he exclaimed. " I am not subject to *your* orders. Is it not enough that I have fought, aye, and bled, too, in your cause—a cause in which I have no personal interest—but that I must put up with insult in addition ? "

" If you talk of insult," retorted Rokta hotly, " there are two sides to *that* question. Your whole manner and bearing towards me, for some time past, have been but covert insult."

" And what about yours towards me ? " demanded Wydale. " How much longer do you suppose I shall endure your supercilious airs ? "

At this, Rokta put his hand on his sword and drew it ; Wydale instantly did the same, while Idelia sprang up with a cry of fear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GREAT NAVAL BATTLE.

BEFORE the terrified Idelia could make up her mind what action she should take to prevent the duel that seemed imminent, Monella had again come into the apartment, and the princess stretched out her hands to him appealingly. He quickly gauged the situation and strode between the disputants.

"How now?" he asked, looking with unusual sternness from the one to the other. "Prince! Wydale! Have we, then, no longer foemen to fight, that we must begin to quarrel amongst ourselves? I never thought, prince, to see you draw your sword on one who is your guest, and your people's; who, moreover, has done such service against your enemies. And you, my friend,"—addressing Wydale—"is it fitting that you should thus attack one of the leaders of a people that have received you kindly, and treated you with honour?"

Both the hot-headed young men looked somewhat ashamed at this rebuke. But, when Monella inquired what the quarrel was about, they remained obstinately silent. Neither cared to avow what each knew to be the actual cause; while the ostensible one was too trivial—as they both well knew—to lay before Monella.

Since both kept silence, Monella turned to Idelia and inquired the truth of her.

"Indeed," she said, "there was no cause that I know of."

"Well!" Monella said, addressing the two, and with a touch of irony in his tone, "since there is no matter in dispute of sufficient importance to be imparted to the friend of both, I trust I may express a hope that matters will proceed no further."

Both sulkily sheathed their swords, Rokta addressing Monella thus :

"I have no wish to quarrel ; but he knows how he has offended me. Let him say the word and the matter is at an end."

"I have neither said nor done anything that needs apology," responded Wydale ; "the matter rests with him."

"Well, we can talk it over another time, my Lord Monella," concluded Rokta ; and with that he walked away.

Idelia also went away ; and Monella, left alone with Wydale, looked inquiringly at him, and shook his head.

"It is all very well to reproach me, as your looks appear to do," Wydale burst out, "but that man's manner to me lately has been more than I can bear. You know," he went on, with emotion, "how he is behaving. And you know, or guess, my secret. Before we came here I had ground for hope that—well—what does it matter what I hoped? It is all done with ; and, of course, I have no right to interfere, perhaps even not to open my mouth. But, when I see Prince Rokta flirting, as he notoriously does, with

one for whom I have a high regard, and see further what is plain to all, that he is breaking the heart of one of the most tender-hearted, sweetest women—when I see all this, and I remember that I am all the time fighting for his country, it is more than I can bear to take his insults patiently. In fact," he burst out recklessly, "I'll fight no more in such a cause." And, with that, he unbuckled his sword, took from his arm the armlet which was the insignia of his rank and the post he held as officer, and flung them into a corner. "Let them give me," he continued, "what is due to me for my share of the cargo of the *Saucy Fan*. With that I can keep myself, I suppose, in this country, until such time as we may be able to get away from it."

Monella looked at him and sighed.

"This is not well, my son," he answered, gently. "Have you then lost all faith in Providence?"

"What would you have?" asked Wydale, moodily. "You cannot surely call upon me to go on fighting but to aid in my own undoing?"

"What I would suggest, my son," returned Monella, kindly, "is that, surely you will not let it be said that you shun the fight?"

"I tell you I will fight for him no more," Wydale rejoined, obstinately.

"Then fight for *me*," replied Monella, laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "If, as you say, we are ever to get away from here, there is much to be done; and you must help. Henceforth you shall be with me and help me alone. Surely you will not refuse me that?"

Wydale took the hand held out to him, and pressed it.

"I should be ungrateful, indeed," he said, "if I refused anything you ask of me. Command me always. For you I will even once more fight."

It is but fair to Prince Rokta to observe that, though he had refused to be the first to say a word to make up the quarrel, he secretly acknowledged to himself that he was somewhat in the wrong; and, from that time, was careful to give Wydale no further cause for offence. He was a well-disposed young fellow, with instincts such as we should term gentlemanly and straightforward. The only representative left of one branch of the ancient kings of Atlantis, as Idelia, a distant cousin, was of another branch, he had been brought up with somewhat exaggerated notions of his own importance, and was on that account inclined to be at times haughty and impetuous. Nature had endowed him with such graces that the wonder is that he was not more conceited than he really was. Perhaps the warfare in which he had been engaged more or less for many years had not been without some good effect; he had come to respect courage and bravery in others, and had learned that in hard fighting all are very much on an equality; that hard knocks are pretty equally divided between prince and peasant.

Therefore, it had come about that Rokta could not justify, even to himself, the line of conduct he had pursued towards Idelia and Vanina; therefore, also, he could understand Wydale's animosity. Once, too, in the thick of a fight, when Rokta had been hard pressed, and it had seemed impossible that he could come out alive, a bullet had come whizzing past and laid low his chief antagonist, just when the blow that would have slain

him had been about to fall. And Rokta knew that Wydale had expended for him one of those cartridges which were more precious in that land than diamonds of the same size. Not that soldiers think much of such occurrences, or keep debtor and creditor accounts of the times they save each other's lives in battle. But Rokta had not forgotten ; moreover, at heart, he liked and admired Wydale for his quiet, sturdy courage, and felt inwardly sorry that he should have had good cause for his feelings towards him.

"And yet," said Rokta to himself, by way of consolation or justification, "admiring her, as I know he does, he can scarcely blame me for having fallen under her spell." It was a lame excuse, as he knew ; and he endeavoured to make some amends after the quarrel by behaving with what he considered magnanimity towards his rival. He treated him, when they met—which now was seldom—with such studied friendliness and courtesy that Owen, bitter as his thoughts still were, could find no excuse for continuing the quarrel. And, since neither he nor his rival said anything, and Idelia and Monella preserved equal silence about what had happened, no one outside those four so much as suspected that there had been any quarrel.

Even Sydney Dareville knew nothing of it, for Wydale, somehow, although on very intimate terms with him, shrank from making a confidant of him as regards his feelings towards his sister. Sydney had always seemed proof against the fascinations of the other sex. Nor was he likely to interfere or remonstrate with his lively but often imperious sister.

Probably, had Wydale laid his case before him, and solicited his good offices, he would have been met with, "Fortune of war, my boy; fortune of war. He who ventures on slippery ground must expect a fall sometimes;" or some such comment. Moreover, Sydney, for the first time, was said to have a little affair of his own with one Inonia, a very bewitching lady of the Court, who had been specially told off to attend his sister; thus, between that and his military duties, he had little time for anything else. Indeed, some went as far as to say that the dashing soldier, with his gay, mercurial temperament, was such a favourite amongst the ladies of the Court that this little flirtation was not the only one in which he was involved.

One morning at daybreak, a great fleet of galleys and other vessels moved out of the harbour of Dilandis and proceeded, drawn up in battle array, in the direction of Karanda, King Kara's capital. The sides of the vessels had been raised by the addition of an upper work of sheet iron, which formed a protection for those on board, and almost hid them from sight. But for this, it would have been apparent not only that the vessels did not carry so many fighting men as usual, but that what they were wore scarcely any armour. Even their heavy shields had been left behind, the iron screen raised above the bulwarks being deemed sufficient for their protection. All sails and banners had been discarded, and the masts reduced in height to make the boats lighter and enable them to carry less ballast. The procession rowed slowly along the coast, here a great wall of precipitous cliff that rose almost perpendicular

from the sea. At one point it attained the dimensions of a small mountain of crystal rock, that glittered and sparkled in the sunlight. Beyond this, the rocky wall continued as before, until there could be seen against the sky-line the towers and minarets that marked the city of Karanda, the object of their attack. From a distance the place was not unlike Dilandis. There were great water-gates, ramparts dotted at intervals with watch-towers, fortifications of stone running along for some distance on both sides of the harbour; while in the background rose hazy, purple mountains that soared up, steep and inaccessible, almost to the clouds.

Beyond the walls and ramparts could be seen the upper portions of stately buildings, temples of curious design built on a colossal scale, with mighty towering columns, palaces with pinnacles that glistened in the sunlight as though of burnished gold. From some of these ascended spirals of light blue smoke that drifted lazily away into the distance.

When the Dilandian fleet had approached within half a mile, the great water-gates swung open and showed within a swarm of vessels that at once came out to meet it. They issued forth with beat of drum and blare of trumpet, and amid the shouts and cheers of the crowds that had gathered to see them off. Emerging from the harbour gates, they spread out to right and left, adopting a crescent-shaped formation that extended farther and farther as more and more vessels poured out of the harbour and pushed forward to the centre of the line.

All displayed sail-banners, richly worked in purple and silver, and hung on masts that glistened as though

themselves of silver. The prows and sterns stood high out of the water, and on the former were figure-heads of dragon-like monsters, somewhat after the fashion of those on Chinese junks. The hulls were silver and ivory white, with a broad purple band running from end to end and following the shear of the vessel's build. The high ends were filled with armed men, and the sunlight flashed and sparkled upon their armour and arms, upon burnished helmet and breastplate, and polished spears and shields. Overhead were pennons and streamers of varied colours that were shifted constantly, no doubt signalling orders and answering signs from one vessel to another.

This was the great armada of which there had been in Dilandis so much talk and not a little fear, but of which nothing had till now been seen. Certainly it made a glittering and imposing array, and it outnumbered the Dilandian vessels by about two to one. The craft themselves were also, on the average, larger and more massive-looking; and they carried, in the total, probably three times as many fighting men.

Altogether it looked as though the attacking fleet would stand but little chance against the powerful force opposed to them. Apparently the Dilandians were of that opinion, for they no sooner saw this armada advancing towards them, than every vessel put about and headed for their harbour, the Karanite fleet following them with shouts, and cries, and jeers.

It afterwards appeared that the readiness of the Karanites to come out and offer battle was due to the fact that Monella had despatched to them, three

days before, a notice of his intended visit. He had sent back, in a small boat, two prisoners with his challenge. The Karanites had at once decided to take it up, and had hastily set to work to give the finishing touches to the armada they had so long been making ready.

It looked as though the Dilandians, when sending their challenge, had under-estimated the force of their opponents, and that now, having found out their mistake, they were anxious to regain the shelter of their harbour and fortifications. At all events they rowed away as if for dear life; and their antagonists rowed after them with triumphant shouts. It was soon plain that the pursuers were gaining steadily on the pursued; and, by the time the leading vessels of the latter had come abreast of their harbour, the gates were seen to be closed, as though those left in charge had either laid aside their usual vigilance, or had closed them in a panic against their friends. There being no time to wait for the gates to be opened, the Dilandians had only the alternatives of remaining to fight, and continuing their flight past their own city and round the island.

They chose the latter, and the triumphant cries of their pursuers became a frantic roar as they urged their boats along, vying with one another as to which should make the first capture of the flying vessels. Men armed with whips stood over the toiling rowers, and the cruel lashes cracked in the air and descended here and there upon the weakest and those who showed signs of flagging. And the perspiring oarsmen, thus urged, tugged and pulled at the long sweeps with savage energy; the oars made swirls in

the water, and splashed it around, as they dipped into it with powerful strokes, and the vessels plunged forward with jerks that told of the frantic efforts that were being made. But in spite of all exertions, when they passed between the city of Dilandis, on the one side, and the caverns, on the other, the boats they were chasing, having far lighter loads to carry, now steadily kept their distance in front, and even began to draw away from their pursuers.

Suddenly—just when the last of the Karanite line had passed—the water-gates that shut in the entrance to the caverns opened, and there glided out a new antagonist, the sight of which filled with astonishment and fright those of the pursuers who were near enough to see it well. To them it looked like an uncouth and hideous monster, making its way, at an amazing speed, along the top of the water, without fins, or other means of locomotion. Its shape roughly resembled a great fish, and the part visible above the surface showed a body and back round and smooth as that of a whale's, large glaring eyes, and great jaws which kept opening and shutting with vicious snaps that could be heard hundreds of yards away. This appalling creature started in pursuit of the Karanite fleet, tearing through the water at a speed that threw up showers of spray in front, and left a long track of foaming, dancing waves behind it. It gained upon them rapidly, and when it came nearer, there could be heard, besides the fierce snap of the powerful jaws, another sound, as of a savage beast that panted and snorted with impatience to seize its prey. The Karanites in the rearmost galleys, when they saw this apparition rushing through the water

after them, were seized with horror and affright. Some wildly fired arrows at it ; but they only glanced off from its sides and fell into the sea. When it came nearer, others launched spears and javelins ; but always with the same result. Then, when it was close astern, some hastily threw off the heavier pieces of their armour and leaped into the sea ; others, more panic-stricken still, sprang overboard as they were, and sank beneath the waves to be seen no more. As to these timid ones, it must be remembered that they had in their own country the dreaded Kralen, and had therefore good reason for believing in the existence of all sorts of dreadful monsters. Others, of tougher fibre, stuck to their posts, and kept their weapons in hand, determined to attack the monster fiercely when it should close with them. But this it did not do. It swerved when it came nearer, and dashed past at a distance of two or three feet. Taking no notice of those in the vessel, it bit its way savagely through the oars, breaking them all off short ; then it raced on to catch up the next boat, which it treated in the same strange fashion. In this way it overtook all the vessels of one line of the Karanite fleet, snapping off their oars on the one side ; then, turning round, it returned down the line on the opposite side, breaking off the oars on that. Then, taking no notice of the fighting men on board, or the missiles they launched at it, it attacked the second line. At the end of half-an-hour every boat in the Karanite fleet had been crippled by the loss of its oars ; and, when spare ones were put out, they also were snapped off. There being no wind to fill the sails, in less than an hour nearly the whole array

were drifting helplessly and aimlessly about, unable to either move or steer. The exceptions were two or three stragglers that had managed to make their escape in time, and were not considered worth following up. It was thought desirable that one or two should take home news of the unexpected, terrible disaster that had overtaken the rest of the expedition.

Meantime, the Karanite fleet lay motionless and helpless upon the water. Those on board the different vessels chafed and fumed, and, no doubt, cursed and swore in Karanite. They looked around them in absurd dismay and helplessness, wondering what was to come next. But what was most humiliating, and drove them almost to the verge of madness, was the fact that the Dilandian fleet ignored them ; or, at least, exhibited a deliberation and indifference which were as galling as unexpected. They merely surrounded the helpless vessels, keeping well out of bow-shot, and then rested on their oars. To the Karanites this was more exasperating than an attack, in which, at least, seeing that their boats were of greater weight and their fighting men better armed, they might expect success. But the Dilandians appeared to be in no hurry, and the two fleets remained for some time watching one another in very strange, unwarlike fashion. Then it became apparent that the Dilandians were waiting for some further development of their plan, for, though resting idly on their oars, they looked expectantly, but silently, towards the cavern gates, while the Karanites, lately so full of jeers and cries of triumph, sat equally silent and expectant.

And now came into view the cause of the delay ; the gates of the cavern opened, and there came forth, towed by three or four boats, the *Saucy Fan*, but no longer the *Saucy Fan* of old. Instead, there towered up a great mass, a colossal, mastless barge ; and shortly great sweeps were thrust out from her sides, whereupon the towing boats drew off. To the smaller boats about her, the vessel appeared like a Triton amongst minnows. Taking her masts away had raised her much higher out of the water, since she now required little or no ballast to fit her for her new duties in the sheltered waters around Atlantis. And her actual height above the surface of the water had been further added to by a breast-work of loop-holed iron plates. Slowly, majestically, she approached the Karanite ships ; the great sweeps that urged her forward worked with the precision of machinery ; she carried no flags or colours, nor could a human being be seen upon her decks. But as she neared the foremost of her enemies, a tall form rose slowly into view above the bow, and Monella, looking calmly down upon the crowded decks of the galleys ranged in front of him, hailed them through a speaking trumpet.

"Men of Karanda," he called out, "yield ye ! Yield ye now, and quickly, or take the consequences !"

For answer there came a shower of arrows, which he quietly threw off from his shield, then he disappeared. The desperate Karanites shot more arrows, and hurled their spears and javelins in vain against the iron-bound sides of the approaching vessel. Slowly, but relentlessly, she came on ; and now shouts and howls went forth from the helpless

Karanites when they perceived and realised her object. But all their yells of rage and cries of terror and despair were useless. The *Saucy Fan*, advancing with irresistible power and weight, crashed into and rode clean over the smaller vessels in her path ; and lo ! nothing was left to mark her course but the tops of two or three masts and banners slowly sinking beneath the water, and struggling men, trying vainly to swim, but borne down by their armour. A few, indeed, had thrown it off in time, and now made desperate efforts to climb the sides of the *Saucy Fan*, or to force their way into the port-holes from which the sweeps ran out. But the sides of the vessel were as smooth and slippery as glass ; the ports were too small to climb into ; a few hung on in desperation to the sweeps, whereupon arrows and spears were hurled upon them from the deck, and they quickly sank to rise no more. The *Saucy Fan* passed on ; and each time she came to a vessel, or a group of them, the same demand for surrender was heard, and, if refused, was followed by the same result. But one group of the Karanite vessels, being better provided than the others with spare oars, now came towards the *Saucy Fan*, and, in answer to the order to surrender, rowed round her and tried to shoot at the rowers through the port-holes. These vessels contained the *élite* of the Karanite fleet ; all the principal officers were gathered there, and they had resolved to make one last desperate attack. But they met with even a worse fate than the others, for, instead of arrows, spears, and javelins, there now came hurtling over the bulwarks a storm of fiery missiles that filled them with astonishment and fright. They were, in fact, a shower

of fireworks—crackers and fizzing squibs, fiery wheels and serpents, and plunging, hissing rockets, spreading panic and dismay amongst the crowded decks on which they fell. But worse even than this was yet to come, for now streams of petroleum were poured forth. Jets, thrown from hydropults, fell upon the blazing fireworks, and upon those standing near them; in a few seconds the boats took fire, and hapless creatures, with blazing clothes, leaped madly into the water. Two galleys made an attempt at a last savage revenge, purposely bringing their burning vessels alongside the *Saucy Fan* in the hope that she might be set on fire and perish with them. But this manœuvre was easily defeated by the sweeps, which prevented their approaching her; and, when they frantically strove to break the sweeps up with their axes, they were found to be metal-covered, and to resist all their efforts. And still the *Saucy Fan* passed on, as though in dignified contempt, leaving behind her wrecks and struggling men and cries of despair and rage. The Dilandian galleys closed with the remaining Karanite boats, and the people on board them having, for the most part, no more fight in them, yielded without further struggle.

An hour or two later, a triumphant procession returned to Dilandis, bringing with them more than half of the Karanite fleet that had sailed out that morning, in such brave array. And their triumph was the greater, and the more welcome, inasmuch as it was an almost bloodless victory, so far as their own side was concerned. Thus ended the great and decisive naval battle.

CHAPTER XIX.

KING KARA.

WHEN, the following day, Monella's fleet once more sailed out and approached the city of their enemies, they were met by a galley bearing on its mast a triangular flag, the three sides of which were respectively purple, white, and green. This meant, in those parts, a flag of truce, and signified that King Kara was desirous of a parley. The galley brought, in fact, a letter for Monella; it ran thus:—

"Since it has been written that thou wert to prevail against me, oh stranger Chief! I fain would crave permission to approach the rulers and council of thy nation with overtures of peace. I know that thou wouldst not trust thyself in my capital; but I am willing to visit thine, if thou givest me thy safe permit. Send me thine answer, and, if it be well, expect me three days hence.

KARA."

To this epistle a reply was sent acceding to the request, and promising protection to King Kara and his chief officers during their visit to Dilandis. And three days later, an hour before noon, a small procession was seen approaching the harbour, and soon afterwards King Kara and a dozen richly dressed

followers landed at the quay, and made their way through long ranks of the populace and soldiers, who had drawn up to see them pass to the palace. In the dress, especially in the armour worn by these strangers, there was a marked difference in style and workmanship from that prevailing in Dilandis. Their helmets were square at the top instead of round ; they were more richly damascened ; the plumes that waved above them were of purple, and the prevailing colour of the dresses was also purple, relieved in some with black, and set off with precious stones worked into many strange devices. Certainly they made a brilliant show, all fine-looking, handsome men, but haughty in their carriage, and in some cases not too well-favoured, notwithstanding their undoubtedly attractive figures. In due course, they were received in the Hall of Audience, where Vanina, Gralda, Prince Rokta, Monella, and the other members of the Court were gathered.

Into this brilliant throng, King Kara walked with the air of a conqueror come to receive homage rather than of a defeated monarch suing for peace. He was a finely formed man of upright build, with a face that had a curious, almost fantastic beauty. His age it was difficult to guess. He might have been a rather grave-looking man of thirty ; or a hale and vigorous man of fifty. There was in his soldierly bearing a mingling of kingly dignity, with a consciousness of suppressed power. His demeanour was marked by unusual grace and polished ease ; but perhaps his eyes were the most striking feature of his personality. Dark, piercing, glittering, they seemed to partake of a characteristic of the Romany race ; to have the

power of looking through, and beyond the person upon whom they fell, as though they could see there something undiscerned by others. In the glance with which he swept the room, and took in all around him, there was a suggestion of contempt. Yet when he smiled, his face took an expression that would have rendered him attractive, almost fascinating, in any company. His glance moved on until it rested on Monella, on whom it remained fixed with curiosity, and certainly with strange intensity, for perhaps half a minute. Then, with the slightest possible smile, he turned his look upon Vanina. She had been watching him with interest and sparkling eyes, her face flushed, and her bearing proud and full of queenly dignity. But at his gaze she paled, then shivered and drew back; almost, indeed, she seemed to reel as though about to faint. But he only bowed low, and thus addressed her:

"I have no need to ask before whom I bend the knee. There can be but one being called Vanina, and her I surely see before me!"

This was said in the language of the country, which Vanina now spoke and understood fairly well. She was about to frame a reply when Prince Rokta, who was beside her, interposed:

"We are not assembled here to-day, King Kara, to hear compliments, but to listen to thy petition for peace. Thou hast sought this interview; say what thou hast to say as shortly as may be."

Kara looked haughtily at the young man, smiled slightly, and again there came into his eyes the suggestion of contempt.

"Truly I have come," he replied, "to sue for peace;

but I see no harm if I express by way of preface my appreciation of the heroism and courage which, as I know, have been exhibited by this most noble lady, and to which, indeed, it is reported your people owe no small part of the successes they have gained. I have come to-day to propose a peace; I acknowledge that it will be of no avail for us to carry further these hostilities. Therefore am I ready to submit to reasonable and just terms of settlement. Doubtless you are already prepared with them. If you will state them, I will listen; and, if they should be just and reasonable, I will accede to them."

Here Monella and Gralda, who were seated a little apart, conferred together in a low tone; then Monella rose, and, addressing Kara, said:

"We have no wish, King Kara, to impose harsh terms. It would be in our power to demand a large indemnity, and to enforce it. We are in a position to carry fire and sword throughout thy realm, and retaliate upon thy people the suffering and misery that thou hast inflicted upon the inhabitants of this island. But we purpose to do no such thing; we desire only that there be no more bloodshed and to live at peace in future with our neighbours. Prisoners of war shall be exchanged, although we have many more of thine than thou hast of ours. We must have, in addition, full guarantees for thy good faith. There must be no possible ground for fear that thou wilt not keep to the terms of the bargain to be made. Further, we think we have it in our power to be of service to thy people, and to save them from that tyranny of thy priestly government which has called for a heavy roll of victims, and cast gloom and misery

over the survivors. Therefore, we desire to know, art thou willing to undertake that all human sacrifices shall henceforth cease throughout thy land?"

At this King Kara hesitated; he looked at Monella, and from him to Gralda; whereupon the latter rose, and, with an air of grave dignity, addressed him.

"It had been our wish, oh King Kara," he began, "to impose on thee and on thy people conversion to the true religion of the one great God. And we have given much thought to the question of our duty in this regard. But, being justly of opinion that it becomes us not to force our religion upon others at the sword's point, but rather to induce them to embrace it by the force of our example, and the blessings they will see around us in their future intercourse with our country; we are willing to forego the immediate fulfilment of this our great desire. We are willing to confine our terms to those stated by the Lord Monella. If we cannot righteously insist upon your people changing their religion, at least we can, and do insist, that human sacrifice shall cease, and that thy people shall be free to come and go in thy land without being oppressed by the shadow of this great horror. Say, art thou willing to comply with this demand? If so, the rest is easy."

King Kara raised his head, and in a clear voice, that rang through the hall, replied:

"So far as regards myself, I have no wish that it should be otherwise. My difficulty will arise when I endeavour to enforce these terms. The power of the priests is great in my land, and a large section of my subjects might side with them against my will.

But I will do my best ; more than this I cannot promise."

Then followed speeches and arguments as to many points of detail ; at the end of which, Monella, Gralda, and others of the chief councillors and officers of State, retired to consult together, leaving Kara and his attendants to await them.

In the council chamber there was a long and anxious conference. Monella had been strongly in favour of insisting upon the Karanites formally abandoning their heathenish religion. He pointed out that such a change would constitute the only true basis for a firm and durable peace. He feared, he said, that otherwise, ere very long, when the Karanites should have recovered from their defeat, their priestly advisers would urge them on, and with success, to a fresh hostile outbreak. But the other councillors were disposed to be satisfied with a cessation of human sacrifice ; trusting that the rest of what they all devoutly wished for might be brought about spontaneously.

Upon one point, at any rate, Monella insisted firmly, and that was that King Kara should be required to give hostages for carrying out whatever terms might be agreed to. "Otherwise," said he, "what security have we that he may not treacherously seize upon some of our subjects unawares, and deliver them over to his priestly friends, the first time he has reason to fear a hostile step from them ?"

When, therefore, a short time later, the councillors returned to the Hall of Audience, bringing with them the written terms of the proposed treaty, Monella, before handing it to King Kara, thus addressed him :

"Here, oh king, are the terms upon which we have decided; but, before I hand them to thee, let it be clearly understood that we shall not be content to trust to thy word alone for their performance. We require *guarantees*; and these guarantees must take the form of hostages approved by us. It is useless," with a wave of the hand, when he saw that Kara was about to reply impatiently, "it is useless to discuss this point. We are resolved, and if thou wilt not comply, we are prepared, and firmly resolute, to take our guarantee ourselves, by carrying on the war until we have taken possession of thy city, and can dictate our terms in thine own palace. Choose then, oh King Kara, between these alternatives."

During this speech, Kara's eyes had almost seemed to flash forth fire, so furious was he. If looks could have annihilated, he would certainly have slain the man who so addressed him then and there; but of this Monella took no notice. Undoubtedly there had been in his manner, during his address, that which clearly indicated that he placed little reliance upon Kara's promises, and was assenting to the moderate terms proposed against his own inclinations. There was, to the bystanders, something almost of mystery in the looks exchanged between these two. Kara glared at Monella, as might a savage wolf at a lion, while the lion, on his part, looked back upon the wolf with indifference, and as though he were almost beneath his notice. Many present wondered; for it was the first time, perhaps, they had ever seen Monella display such marked contempt towards anyone.

But whatever Kara thought, he managed to swallow

down his rage, and, assuming an air of good-natured remonstrance, he replied :

"The great Chief Monella is pleased to speak with some discourtesy ; he distrusts my kingly promise ; it shall be seen in the future whether this is a just position to assume towards me. I will give you all reasonable guarantees, and hostages you can approve. In fact," bowing to Vanina, "if your Queen will receive her, I will send to your Court as hostage, among others, my sister the Princess Morveena."

At this there was a buzz of surprise throughout the hall, and Kara gave a glance at Monella, and then at those around him, that was full of a quiet triumph, as might a man who has scored an unexpected advantage in a difficult game. And the expression on Monella's face showed that the proposal was both unexpected and distasteful. Possibly he had reasons of his own for not wishing to see the sister of King Kara established at the Court, whether in a sort of honourable captivity, or otherwise. But the suggestion commended itself to the other members of the council ; They looked upon it as an undeniable evidence of Kara's *bona fides*, and they intimated their willingness to accept it. Thereupon, the draft treaty was handed to King Kara, and he was invited to retire with his companions to an apartment in which they could discuss the details privately.

During their absence the assembly broke up into groups, and the buzz of conversation became general. Idelia, who throughout the interview had been seated beside Vanina, now rose, and drew her on one side.

"I do fear and distrust that man," she said to Vanina, with a shudder, "and, from what I have

heard about his sister, I feel convinced I cannot like her. I hope she will not visit us on any terms whatever."

Idelia glanced inquiringly into the other's face; but Vanina, instead of answering, gazed dreamily from the window; and Idelia turned sadly away. For a long time she had been depressed, not to say sad, in her intercourse with those around her; but towards Vanina she ever exhibited affection, though it might not be of so demonstrative a character as at first. Now, just when Idelia was walking away, Vanina suddenly seized her arm, and, pressing closely to her, said, in a tone and manner new with her:

"Do not go away, Idelia! Do not leave me! I, too, do not—oh! but what am I saying?" she broke off; "I know not exactly what is the feeling that has taken possession of me. I only know, dear sister, that I want you not to leave me now. There is something in your presence that imparts a sense of safety."

Idelia's large, truthful-looking eyes opened wide on her in innocent surprise. Vanina had spoken hurriedly, almost hysterically; the first time, probably, she had ever displayed emotion of the kind since her arrival. And Idelia marvelled while she walked beside her, and led her into another room, where they found themselves alone. There, to her astonishment, Vanina sat down, and, burying her face in her hands, broke into tears. Idelia, leaning over her, kissed her gently, and entreated to be told the cause of her distress. But Vanina for some time only shook her head and continued to weep. After a while, becoming calmer, she addressed Idelia:

"No doubt you are surprised to see me thus. You cannot be so surprised, however, as I am myself. Never before, I think, in my life, have I been thus affected; something tells me I have cause for fear of the unknown—a fear I know not how to fight against. And something whispers to me that, if I fear, it is because I am not *good* enough to resist an evil influence. If I were *good* like you, dear little sister, I should have no cause for this dread that is upon me!"

Idelia comforted her tenderly, and led her to her own apartment, where they remained long in confidential converse. And they were seen in the Court no more that day.

When King Kara returned to the Hall of Audience, the first thing he did was to glance round inquiringly, and a slight touch of disappointment in his face showed that he noted the absence of Vanina and Idelia. This did not escape the notice of Prince Rokta, who, throughout the previous interview, had eyed him keenly and even anxiously. Perhaps he was a little jealous of the other's physical gifts; for, undoubtedly, Kara's was an extremely attractive and even fascinating personality. Even Rokta's courtly grace and almost perfect figure lost something of their former charm beside the power of this new-comer. Rokta's graces became, indeed, but mere boyish beauty compared with the matured perfection of a man evidently born to please. And Kara seemed to be well aware of this, and comported himself accordingly, with an air of self-confidence that impressed the younger man, in spite of himself, with a feeling of inferiority.

The negotiations and discussions being presently ended, Kara now conversed freely with those around him, and this he did with a graciousness, and a sort of kingly condescension, that won on almost all about him. Only in the presence of Monella did he show any sign of being ill at ease ; but Monella had left the Court, and appeared no more during the king's stay at the palace. But King Kara's advances towards Prince Rokta were received with such marked coldness that he turned away with an air of contemptuous indifference. Later in the day, the terms of the treaty having thus been settled, Kara and his companions were invited to a banquet as a pledge of mutual goodwill, and there he made himself popular amongst the assembled guests by his wit no less than by his *bonhomie*. Thus it came about that, when they went down to the harbour to re-embark, they were escorted by many of the notables with such evident friendliness that the populace caught the infection of the good impression he had made, and, good-naturedly forgetting all their grievances, gave him a kindly reception and a hearty send-off.

Thus ended King Kara's first visit to the Court at Dilandis, a visit that was fated not to be the last, and to be of supreme importance to all concerned.

Henceforward, Dilandis became a different city. Men put off their armour and returned to peaceful callings. The fishers took up their abandoned occupation, warehouses and bazaars were reopened for the transaction of business and trade intercourse. Ploughs were started, men were set to work to clear and open up once more, for cultivation, tracts that had been given over to a rank growth of weeds.

Throughout the land industry was resumed on every side, and the people set themselves quietly to work to make up for all the time that had been lost, and the drain upon the resources of the country that the long war had entailed. Everyone became cheerful and hopeful, and turned his thoughts to peaceful work. Only a few vigilant men were detailed by Monella to watch the coasts, to make sure that they were well-protected against any treachery on the part of their late enemies.

CHAPTER XX.

PRINCESS MORVEENA.

IN the days of peace and calm that followed upon the ratification of the treaty of peace, intercourse quickly sprang up between the two peoples so long at daggers drawn. Boats went to and fro between the harbours of Karanda and Dilandis, carrying goods and stuffs, making short stays, and bringing back cereals, provisions, live stock, and merchandise in return. The gates that led from the cavern were thrown open so far as to allow of a passage way into the interior of the island, and people passed freely to and fro, and wandered about amid the ruins of ancient Atlantis and in the "Grottoes of a Thousand Lights." But all other parts of the caverns were kept shut off, and closed to everyone save a few of Monella's chosen workmen.

Many an excursion was planned to the ruined city, and many a gay picnic took place amid the time-grown monuments of a remote and unknown past. Many a brilliant fête was held in the wonderful grottoes, which now often resounded with music and song, perhaps much as of old. Amongst those who most often visited the ruins were Wydale and Dr. Manleth, the latter especially seeming never to tire of studying the place and of trying to spell out the

stories of past ages dimly revealed by the moss-covered stones. Here they wandered, frequently accompanied by George, upon the ground of their first meeting with the Kralen, but safe now from the fear of another such visitation. Steps were taken to reclaim the surrounding country, which had become overrun with a rich, tropical growth that, in many places, defied attempts to penetrate it even for purposes of exploration. Nor was rank vegetation the only obstacle, for some parts absolutely swarmed with deadly snakes and other noxious reptiles.

Wydale and the boy were also now able to revisit the bay in which they had first anchored the *Saucy Fan*. Accompanied by Idelia and others, they rowed along its shores, and told again, in greater detail, their adventures on their first arrival.

And now often came over to the Court, King Kara, who avowed his desire to do all he could in a friendly manner to cultivate the confidence of his new friends. He soon became a familiar figure at the receptions and other functions of the Court ; and he so managed to ingratiate himself with his former foes that he became quite popular. True, there were some who stood aloof, and watched this new development with coldness. Monella, Gralda, Prince Rokta, and some others, maintained a state of self-restraint ; but Kara seemed to take no notice of their evident luke-warmness, and steadily to devote himself to proving that his professions were sincere. One of his first acts was to present some curiously wrought pieces of jewellery ornamented with gems of extraordinary lustre and value, to Vanina, Idelia, and many other members of the Court. Marvellous specimens of the

jeweller's art were they, such as won the admiration of all who saw them. Vanina, indeed, so greatly admired that given to her, that at once she hung it round her neck. She regarded it, perhaps, as a sort of trophy or token of the triumph she and her friends had been so largely instrumental in procuring. Idelia, on the other hand, received the one presented to her coldly ; she put it away, and it was no more seen.

Then there came a day when an appointment was made for King Kara's sister, the Princess Morveena, to make her first appearance at the Court ; and to reside there for a time in accordance with the stipulation that had been made. But matters had progressed so rapidly that, though she came ostensibly as a hostage, she was, in fact, received and treated rather as an honoured guest than as a sort of honourable captive.

On the day of her arrival a festival was inaugurated, a gala day, when every endeavour was made to mark the occasion as an auspicious event. Once more the Hall of Audience was thronged with the *élite* of the city ; members of the Court put on their richest attire in honour of the occasion. Once more Vanina, Idelia, Gralda, Prince Rokta, and others, sat in their chairs of state to receive the expected guests. And when King Kara appeared, leading his sister by the hand, cordial shouts of welcome were heard on every side, as she stepped forward and, falling on one knee, with a wondrous graciousness of demeanour, half-laughingly kissed the hands of Vanina and Idelia, "in token of homage," as she put it, "to those who had conquered her country and yet had shown them-

selves such kindly vanquishers." And then, when she drew herself up and looked proudly round, a buzz of admiration went up at sight of her queenly bearing and the remarkable beauty of her face and figure. There was a strong likeness between her and her royal brother; the same cast of features, the same flashing eyes, and the same dignity of carriage. Her beauty, indeed, was something to observe and ponder over; and even those who were least disposed to welcome her could not refuse a tribute of admiration to her outward charms and grace of manner.

Standing thus, gazing with an expression half-haughty, half-appealing, her glance fell upon Owen Wydale, who was standing observing her intently by the side of Monella, Manleth, and a group a little apart. When she looked at him she gave a slight start, and then, after shifting her glance for a brief space, turned to observe him a second time. But now Vanina rose and, descending from the dais, said:

"Princess, do us the honour to seat yourself beside me, that we may show you our welcome is sincere."

And as she led her to her seat, King Kara followed them with a peculiar expression that was remarked and wondered at by a few who were observantly looking on. Then he was invited to seat himself beside his sister.

That Morveena had made a great impression in this her first appearance at the Court of Dilandis was beyond a doubt. Everyone was delighted with her; her wild, picturesque beauty gained the homage of many hearts; and in the festivities, in the dance, and in the song, she gained fresh admirers. For she

was gifted with a thrilling, magnificent voice of great power and compass, and remarkably well-trained. She had other gifts, too, which excited further approval and surprise; and she was soon even more popular than her brother. Sydney Dareville, in particular, did not conceal his admiration; even Prince Rokta, inclined as he was to be moody at the growing friendliness between King Kara and Vanina, seemed inclined to yield to her fascination.

But, during the dances and what followed, it somehow came about that she was frequently to be seen either dancing or walking about with Owen Wydale, to whom she was particularly gracious; so much so that Dareville subsequently rallied him upon the fact. This was when, the assembly having separated, they were walking together on the terrace, breathing the cool air that floated across the water, and watching the lights spread out beneath them.

"I never thought that you were given to flirtation, Wydale," he said, laughing, "but you have scored a success to-night. *I'm* not in it; nor anyone else that I can see. For once you have certainly put even Rokta's nose out of joint; and I could see that he was quite surly about it."

Wydale sighed.

"I wish, Sydney," said he, "that you would not talk in this strain; you must be well aware that there is no foundation for it. Certainly I cannot but see that this new star that has flashed upon us to-night is, in many ways, a wonder. She interests me, and I wish to study her; but it is a study of a kind that you do not understand. Probably you would not understand it any the more if I tried to explain

myself; and, indeed, I don't know that I could."

At this Dareville laughed still more.

"All right, my friend," he said, "call it what you like. You may call it 'studying people'; *I* should call it downright flirtation, to say no more."

"I wish," Wydale went on gravely, "instead of talking in this frivolous fashion, you would help me to study her and her brother. I can't help thinking that they are here to play some game of their own. And unless I very much mistake, Monella thinks so too, though he keeps his own counsel and says nothing."

"All right, Wydale," assented Dareville, with another light laugh, "call it what you please! Study away as much as you like; *I* won't poach upon your ground." And with that, despite the other's protests against his suggestions, he went away, still laughing.

After that Princess Morveena remained at the Court, where she soon became a well-known character. Few there were who could resist her when she chose to make herself agreeable. With Vanina she speedily became great friends; but Idelia remained cold and unresponsive to her advances.

King Kara's visits were repeated; and frequently he and his sister and Vanina, with a few more, made up water parties, or arranged short excursions; and in the evening dances they were the most conspicuous figures.

During this time Dr. Manleth was able to give more time to the laboratory he had established than when his attention had been occupied with the wounded. It was said that he was engaged, amongst

other matters, in trying to manufacture gunpowder. Indeed, he had produced small quantities, but so coarse and roughly made as to be of little use, except in the small brass cannon taken from the *Saucy Fan*. He managed, however, to manufacture some "meal" powder, with which, and the aid of other chemicals available in the place, he made some very passable fireworks to amuse the populace, and add to the entertainments at the evening fêtes. In this work George took a lively interest; indeed, he showed such aptitude for chemical experiments that the good doctor took him into his laboratory and started him on a course of serious scientific training. Wydale also devoted a portion of his time to his tuition, saying it would be a thousand pities that he should be allowed to idle away his days. And so, between the two, the boy was making good progress in studies likely to be of service to him in his after-life.

One day something happened. King Kara came over to pay a visit, bringing amongst his attendants a stranger they had not seen before. He was dressed in an unusually gorgeous costume, with shining breast-plate and a helmet surmounted by a blazing golden plume, and a visor that partly concealed his features. Wydale, from a little distance, observed him attentively; there was something incongruous about the man. To his mind the stranger's bearing was altogether out of keeping with his dress. There was an exaggerated swagger, mingled with a looseness of demeanour, that did not denote either the trained soldier or a man used to the ways of a Court. Moreover—at least, so it appeared to Wydale—he seemed to avoid his scrutiny; and, looking farther and more

narrowly, Wydale was struck with the idea that they had met before. He mentioned his thoughts to Sydney Dareville, who happened to be near him, and who at once turned his attention to the new-comer, and for a short time watched him carefully. Then he drew Wydale to one side, and burst out laughing.

"Don't you recognise him?" he asked; and when Wydale stared in return, he added, "I've spotted him, I'll wager!"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Wydale, in surprise.

Dareville laughed again; and then, bending over towards the other, said, almost in a whisper:

"It's Peter Jennings!"

Wydale started back and stared still more.

"Peter Jennings!" he repeated. "What! the ship's carpenter? One of the crew of the *Saucy Fan*?"

Dareville nodded.

"The same," he said. "That's Peter Jennings, late ship's carpenter in the crew of the *Saucy Fan*, and in the employ of the firm in which I claim to be a partner. But what in the world he's doing here, and in that extraordinary disguise, is more than I can even guess at."

Wydale thought a moment. Then a light broke in on him.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "of course, it is. How blind I have been! I knew there was something familiar about his cut; but, for the life of me, couldn't make out what."

"What we want to know," said Dareville, "is how it came about that he should have been one of the

rascals who deserted us. I always had a better opinion of him."

"So had I," agreed his friend. "We must get him alone and question him, and see what he has to say for himself."

And this was managed a little later, and then they found it was indeed Peter Jennings. And very sheepish and foolish he appeared, when he took off the helmet with the golden plume, and faced the two young men. Despite the fact that they meant to question him severely about his share in the abandonment of the brig, they found it impossible to restrain their laughter when they looked at him.

Peter Jennings was a tall, thin specimen of a Deal boatman. He had a hard, tanned face, with grizzled hair and beard, and the straddling gait and lurching swing peculiar to his class. At one time he had been a boat-builder and shipwright; then a long-shoreman; after that he had shipped on board various vessels, and seen much sea-service as ship's carpenter. Finally, he had drifted on to the *Saucy Fan* in the same capacity.

Imagine such a man, a thorough type of his class, dressed up in a suit that would have made him look ridiculous in a pantomime, carrying sword and dagger, and helmet with waving golden plumes, trying to give himself all the airs of a grand official of the king in whose service it now appeared he was.

"Hush, gentlemen!" he said, looking uneasily around, and with a comical look of apprehension on his face, and raising his hands in deprecation, "for the sake of heaven do not give me away. Mr.

Dareville, Mr. Wydale, sir, as there is a heaven above, I swear I had no hand in deserting you. They gave me something to drink in my grog that sent me to sleep, and, when I woke up, I found myself in the captain's boat; and they told me as how you had shoved off in another."

"Well, Peter," rejoined Dareville, "we are willing to listen to an explanation; and shall only be too glad, if you can satisfy us that you were not an accomplice in that nefarious business. Still, as you can understand, it is a matter that does require an explanation; and a very clear one, too."

"For my part," put in Wydale, "I never had any reason to believe that you were a bad lot, Peter. Indeed, I do not forget that I should have fared badly, that day, out on the jib-boom of the *Saucy Fan*, if you had not given me your help."

"Aye, I be afeared you would, sir. Howsomdever, I don't take no account about *that*. I saw you was in trouble, an' I did my best to help ye out of it; an' very glad I was to see you come back safe and sound with the poor laddie."

"But how came you to be mixed up with such a rascally lot?" asked Dareville.

Peter sighed.

"Ah, that be a long story, sir; but this I *can* say, that when I came to find out what they was like, I felt main sorry, and wished I were well out of it."

"But why," persisted Wydale, "if you were not one of their set, did they not leave you behind with us?"

"I scarce know myself, sir, unless it were that they

thought I might be useful to 'em. I be handy, like, on board a ship, you see, sir."

Dareville nodded.

"Ah, yes ; now tell us what you know about it."

"Well, you see, sir, it were like this—they carried me away, and, when I come to myself, we was off the island here. Then it come out there'd been a big mistake somewheres. I know *now*, from what I've learned since, that they had planned to desert the brig and row off to a ship what had been behind us all along—"

Dareville started.

"What!" he exclaimed, "that craft that was following us day after day?"

"You've just hit it, sir. That were the vessel."

"I told you," said Dareville to Wydale, "that there was something suspicious in that vessel's following us as she did. Now, Peter, what was she, and what was the plot between the two?"

"As I've learned since, sir, she were a sort of filibusterin' boat carrying arms and stores to some part where there were a row goin' on against the Government. Like enough it were Cuba, for all I knows. But the crew of the *Saucy Fan* was nothin' more nor less than a lot of rough fellows as was formerly in the slave trade, as I now knows, an' they was going out to join in with some insurgents. Mr. Blane, as I believes, begging your pardon, sir" (looking at Dareville), "had his own reasons for wishing to lose the *Saucy Fan* with all you aboard. So it was arranged that she should be left entangled in the Sargasso Sea, and that the crew should escape in the boats an' be picked up by the vessel that was

following her. But it didn't come off, because they lost themselves in a fog that came up quick, an', instead of making the friendly vessel, they drifted into a current that brought 'em here. Some on 'em had got at the liquor an' were very drunk, an' they managed to capsize one of the boats, an' lose everything they had aboard, including the rifles and arms they had brought with 'em from the brig. The men in the boat what upset managed to scramble on board the other one; but everythin' else was lost, except your revolvers and some cartridges which that bullyin' brute Foster had took possession of and put aboard t'other boat."

Dareville and Wydale nodded meaningly at each other.

"Then," said Sydney to Wydale, "when they came to attack us that day on the *Saucy Fan*, they had no arms after all!"

"That were just it, sir," replied Peter, "and very much put out they was to find as you had pistols. I heard afterwards as you'd got 'em back from Foster; but they didn't know it then."

"I said at the time," laughed Dareville, "that it was a game of bluff on *our* part, and so it seems it was on their side as well as on 'ours."

"That it were, sir," assented Jennings. "It just upset their little game."

"But where are they *now*?" asked Wydale. "And where have they been all this time?"

Jennings lowered his voice, and almost whispered:

"In prison somewheres, sir, I don't rightly know where; but I've a notion as the priests are sort of

fattening 'em up to make food for some dreadful beasts as they sacrifices people to."

"And how, then, was it that you escaped?"

Again Peter looked cautiously around.

"Don't give me away, gen'l'men," he almost entreated. "You was talking just now about a game of bluff; well, I've tried a little game of that sort of my own. I made out as how I had built many a ship of war in my own country, and were a big man at it. So they took me on and made me—"

Peter hesitated.

"Chief Constructor of their Navy?" Wydale asked, much amused.

Jennings, holding his helmet in his hand, glanced round him to the right and to the left, and even up to the sky, to make quite sure that no one was within hearing, then he looked at the two, and gave what can only be described as a very comprehensive wink.

"It's just that, gen'l'men," he said, with a dry smile. "But you see they thinks a lot of me, and fancies that I was a great man when I was in England."

"A king in his own country," quoted Wydale, with a smile to Dareville. "However," he went on, "you haven't told us yet how you were captured."

"That were only too easy," Peter answered. "They pounced on us like eagles, and, as we had no arms, of course we couldn't make no fight of it. Howsomdever, I should have fared as badly as the rest, and been shut up in prison, if it hadn't been that their great astrologer, who is called Zanolda, somehow took a fancy to me. What 'as become of them I don't know. Very likely they are dead long ago."

"But why," asked Dareville, "should he take the trouble to pick you out from amongst the others?"

"O' course, sir, that puzzled me at the time, because I couldn't speak a word of their lingo, and couldn't make out what all their jabbering was about. But since then I've picked up the language a bit, and I've heard as how as he said that it was written in the stars that I should be useful to them, and that they were not to harm me. And, when I saw their boats, I made signs as how I could build bigger and better ones than any they had got. So they set me to work, and was so pleased with what I did that they gave me a fine dress to wear, and lots of people to work under me; and we've bin at it ever since.' And he looked down with pride upon his gorgeous raiment.

"That accounts for the delay in bringing out their fleet to attack us, I suppose," commented Wydale.

"Jest so, sir. They thought they would have bigger and stronger vessels, if they could gain time. But they kept me in the dark; and I didn't rightly understand that it was *you* and your friends that I was working against."

"H'm! Well, it's a curious story," remarked Dareville. "I hope it's all right, and that you are talking honestly. Anyhow, for the present, we will give you the benefit of the doubt. We shall say nothing against you, unless we see good cause. But, if you are anxious to keep friends with us, you must do nothing further against us, should this peace not last."

"But why," suggested Wydale, "shouldn't he come over to us altogether? No doubt Monella would

find something for him to do. He is altering and re-fitting the *Saucy Fan*, and could always make use of a good shipwright."

Jennings eyed him earnestly.

"If you could manage that, sir," he said, "I'd serve yer faithfully. I've heard a lot about this gen'l'man, Mr. Monella. I've heard as how he's a great man, a fine fighter, an' a wise chief. I have heard that much, even over there," pointing towards Karanda, "amongst them as hates 'im. So he *must* be a downright good un; and I'd rather take service under him than where I am, and where, atween ourselves, gen'l'men," looking round cautiously again, "I don't feel none too safe. Not but what," he added reflectively, looking down again at his resplendent costume, "they've treated me very well so far, and I don't suppose," here he paused, gave another admiring glance at his get-up, and the helmet in his hand, then added regretfully, "I don't s'pose, you know, as Mr. Monella would—"

"Dress you up like *that*," said Dareville, bursting into laughter. "*No!* *that* he certainly would not. However, it is useless to talk further about it now."

Just then some people came strolling towards where the three were talking; so Peter at once put on his helmet, and, drawing himself up, swaggered away, with a grotesque attempt at a military salute.

One day a noteworthy incident occurred. Wydale and George Dareville were rowing in the bay in which the *Saucy Fan* had first cast anchor, when a rushing of wings was heard, and a large crane swooped down and perched itself on the bow of the boat.

"Why," said Wydale, "there is 'Dick,' our crane friend. Fancy his 'spotting' us over here! This is the first time he has ever followed us."

This crane was one of a pair with which they had made friends. In Dilandis, as has already been noted, cranes were made a sort of public pet of. They were trained for many purposes, and some were used as watch-dogs to guard and keep in order flocks of water-fowl of various kinds. And very wonderful it was to see them working. They circled round their charges, taking care that they did not stray too far, and bringing them all home at night, just as well-trained sheep-dogs do in the case of sheep. But there were others which wandered about in a free and easy manner "on their own." Now and then one of these would attach himself to a particular individual, as might a dog in search of a new master, following him or her about, and becoming a very faithful servant and amusing comrade. It was thus that two birds had attached themselves to Wydale, but they had not before followed him so far afield.

The bird now sat gravely on the bow making a curious figure-head, and looking about him with the air of superhuman wisdom characteristic of these birds. Presently the boat touched the sand, and the two prepared to go on shore, whereupon the crane hopped off into the water. There he immediately espied a dainty little fish. His long neck and beak went out like a flash and seized it; but, instead of swallowing it, he dropped it into the boat, and went off after more, which he brought back and dealt with in like manner. All this was done so sedately, and

with such an air of friendly interest, that neither George nor Wydale could refrain from laughing.

"If we go on like this," laughed George, "we shall have a good fish supper indeed. What does he suppose we are going to do with them?"

"We'll see how long he'll be before he tires of this little game," said Wydale, "and what is going to happen afterwards."

But the bird gravely and tirelessly went on catching fish, dropping them into the boat until the two grew tired of watching him, and decided to go off on a hunt for oysters. At this the crane, appearing to know what they wanted, abandoned his pursuit and marched gravely at their side, now and then fishing an oyster out of the water and depositing it on the shore for his friends to pick up. Sometimes the bird stalked on in front, at others he dropped a little behind, and would come rushing up in ludicrous haste flapping his wings in ungainly fashion. Then, suddenly, apparently thinking he had caught enough fish for them for that day, he rose in the air, and soon all that could be seen of him was a small black speck in the distant sky.

After this the bird would often find them out in their excursions in the most unexpected manner, no matter which way they went or how far they sailed. Sometimes he came alone and sometimes accompanied by his mate, and the two birds were always ready to go a-fishing or oyster-catching for their friends, claiming but a very small part of the catch for their own share.¹

¹ An interesting instance of a crane's accompanying a hunter on his daily expeditions is given in Anderson's "Twenty-five Years

Meanwhile King Kara and his sister grew daily more friendly with Vanina and others at the Court, until one day it was announced that the Princess Morveena was about to return to her own city, and that Vanina and her brother Sydney were going with her upon a visit to Karanda.

Upon hearing this news, Wydale, in some inquietude, sought out Monella, and questioned him upon the matter.

"The maiden is acting unwisely in thinking of going thither," was the reply ; "but she is at present headstrong, and will not listen to the advice of older and cooler heads. I like it not, and fear me greatly that it will lead her into danger."

in an Ox-waggon," a record of travel and adventure in South Africa. In some parts of South America, also, it may be noted, cranes are made into useful friends, and trained to look after the poultry and other feathered denizens of the farm-yard. There they make their authority felt like vigilant sheep-dogs, and keep order amongst those disposed to be quarrelsome or to stray too far from home.—*Author.*

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST OF THE GREAT CUTTLES.

IT has been said that that nation is happy which has no history—*i.e.* (presumably), for the time being. If this is true, it applied, certainly, for some months to the group of islands which constitute, to-day, all that is left of "Ancient Atlantis." For during many months that followed the conclusion of the treaty with King Kara little occurred to disturb the peaceful relations of the erstwhile enemies. They traded together, they visited, and even inter-married; and the peace, concluded after so many years of incessant fighting, bid fair to be a lasting one. There was, in effect, free intercourse; everyone from one town was at liberty to wander over to the other, whether bent on business or pleasure, or mere idle curiosity; was free to stay so long as he liked, and to return to his own country when it so pleased him.

Between the two "Courts" the same relationship obtained. At first the announcement that "Queen" Vanina had arranged to visit King Kara and his sister made a great sensation. But when, in course of time, such visits had been exchanged again and again, and no untoward consequence had ensued, public curiosity in the matter died away.

Months passed, and still the relative positions of

the two communities remained much the same. King Kara kept to the terms of the treaty, and the inhabitants of the respective islands were daily becoming more friendly, more intimate, and more given to the interchange of commodities. The plans for the reclamation of the country around the ruins of the ancient city of Atlantis were taking form, and projects with this object were considered.

Thus time sped on, and everyone in this little "shut-in world" passed it in various ways, according—like those, doubtless, in the great world outside—as their fancies, or their passions, or their interests dictated.

Between the two Courts, matters continued much the same upon the surface. But Vanina's repeated visits to King Kara's Court, at the instance of his sister, the Princess Morveena, and the growing friendship between these two and Vanina, which was so marked as to be obvious to all observers, was a source of profound grief to two or three at least of the silent lookers-on.

Needless to say, Wydale was one of these; but time sped on and he found himself, perforce, compelled to settle down into a world in which Vanina no longer filled his thoughts. He regarded her, indeed, as lost to him for ever, and endeavoured to find consolation in studious converse with George, his *protégé*, past and present.

It is a curious little fact in that complex mystery we are fond of generalising under the head of Human Nature, that if a human being, young or old, of generous instincts, once finds himself drawn into a position of protector of one weaker than himself, he

cannot afterwards wholly dissociate himself from the rôle for the remainder of his life. The *protégé* may prove himself ever so unworthy; he may turn against his "protector" and offend him again and again, but the same generosity that prompted the stronger to help and protect the weaker will intervene, again and again, in favour even of him who has shown himself undeserving of it.

Thus it was that Wydale, having once, at the imminent peril of his life, befriended George, could never afterwards divest himself of a feeling that partook both of love and responsibility towards the boy. Hence his insisting upon his spending a portion of his time with him in study.

So matters went on. George, rejoicing in his youth, in the high position he held in the eyes of all the Dilandians in his rank of prince, and his place in the cadet battalion, in which he was one of the most skilful at single stick, fencing, and bow and arrow, nevertheless submitted himself dutifully to both Wydale and Dr. Manleth, and gratefully accepted the daily routine to which they subjected him during certain days of the week. And even at other times, Wydale was almost always his companion; the good doctor remaining immersed in his various researches.

And here it may be stated that his discoveries threw little light upon the past history of Atlantis. Many different accounts did he hear and read in ancient parchments that he unearthed, and many ancient legends did he study. But the first origin of all was lost in the mists of ages, and he never succeeded in getting beyond a general outline or theory, which may be summed up thus:—The

greater part of the great island of Atlantis had sunk beneath the waves, the portion now left above water being what had once been the highest parts—in other words, the tops of the highest mountains. All the rest of what had once been a vast island continent had disappeared, carrying with it probably not one city, but many, including the real ancient city of Atlantis, the ruins still remaining being those, he conjectured, of a hill station, or health resort that had been built up amongst the former mountains of the land. Some traditions affirmed that there had once been seven kingdoms, each governed by a separate monarch, but all welded into one powerful state under the general name of Atlantis. And the many hundreds of square miles of rocky shallows which lay around the present islands, and amongst which the masses of Sargasso weed brought down by the Gulf Stream had found a congenial resting-place, were in reality the higher parts of the submerged continent.

As to the city of Karanda, it had also once, Dr. Manleth concluded, been a town amongst the mountains, and probably the headquarters of a hierarchy, since it contained temples and other religious buildings all designed upon a scale of great magnificence. The doctor repeatedly visited Karandis to inspect these structures, but was not permitted to see more than the outside; priestly bigotry jealously guarded the interiors, and he was never able to get beyond the portals. But, as in the case of the other towns and ruins, he decided that they were, for the most part, comparatively modern; rebuildings, that is to say, of structures that had been destroyed in the great convulsion that had swallowed up everything

save a small portion of the high lands of the country. Then, surrounded by an almost impenetrable maze of rocky shoals, that became quickly choked with the floating weed, the survivors of the catastrophe became isolated from the rest of the world and had since so remained.

At rare intervals, some little-understood combination of opposing currents would force aside the masses of weed which normally choked up certain deep channels of a steady stream, and would then pour for a limited period round the group of islands, entering on the south-west side and passing away through similar channels to the south-east and north. This, with the movements of some undercurrents, probably due to differences in temperature between the Gulf Stream and the colder waters of the Atlantic Ocean, prevented the open water around the islands from becoming altogether stagnant.

Such is a brief outline of the story of Atlantis, so far as the doctor could unravel it from the materials subjected to his observation. But though the results may appear meagre and unsatisfactory from an historical point of view, yet the opportunities his unique position afforded for study of the ruins and monuments, and still more of the descendants of the people, were not wholly wasted.

For some eight months, only one event occurred that caused any stir in the community; this was a fight with the great cuttle-fish that for many years had haunted the waters of the bay in which the *Saucy Fan* had first cast anchor. It was believed that these great creatures had in the past been responsible for the otherwise unaccountable disappearance of many

of the islanders who had gone out fishing alone, and had never since been heard of. Their boats had sometimes been found floating about, empty and deserted, yet with nothing missing from them except their owners. Of course these might, in some cases, have been captured by their enemies the Karanites ; but such an explanation could not always be made to fit all the circumstances. And then, when men began to be afraid to venture alone, and so went fishing in parties of two or more, and taking care to carry heavy axes, and to keep them handy for use, it was not long before reports were made of vicious and resolute attacks by these monsters, on the boats—attacks that had often been beaten off only with considerable difficulty and danger.

From all accounts the creatures were as cunning as they were powerful and ferocious. They would lurk, motionless and unsuspected, near the surface of the water, and if a boatful of fishers too strong for attack approached, it would be allowed to pass ; whereas a single occupant in a boat would be seized and dragged out ere he had time to let go his oars to defend himself, or could even cry out.

It so happened, however, that for a long period following the arrival of the brig nothing was seen or heard of these giant cuttles. Perhaps, after the adventure of the swordfish, and the attack on those in the vessel—in which one, at least, of the two was known to have been badly wounded—they became still more cunning. Or, perhaps, they had made off, in their baffled fury, along the open channel that then led out of the bay, and, when it became closed again, could not immediately get back. But, whatever the

cause, it is certain that, after an interval of some months, during which they were never seen or heard of, they suddenly reappeared upon their old hunting ground—or rather, water—and signalled their return by dragging a poor fellow out of a boat and making off with him.

The survivors came in and told their tale with loud expressions of horror and affright ; it was thereupon decided to make a determined attempt to destroy the monsters. From the statement made, the attack had been so sudden that the occupants of the boat had had no time even to attempt resistance, or to rescue their unhappy comrade. Like a lightning flash, “ something ” had darted across the bulwarks, twined round the victim, and dragged him over the side before he could let go his oar, or could cling to anything in the craft. Then the others had seen a great mass rise above the surface, long snake-like arms were raised twisting and wriggling in the air, two great eyes appeared that glared at the boat with a look that froze their blood, there was a mighty plunge, a swirl in the water, and—nothing more. Then the survivors, seized with panic, had rowed with all speed away, and returned to the harbour to tell the terrible tale.

During the next three weeks an organised hunt was carried on, but without result, till early one morning a boat came in with the news that one of the creatures had been sighted on the shore, amongst some rocks on a lonely part of the coast a few miles distant. Some ten or twelve boats quickly put out ; most of those on board wearing the armour that had now been long discarded. This was to protect

them from the crushing power of the long "arms" of the cuttle should they coil round them. Our friends, as well as the doctor, were included in the party.

When the party reached the spot, they saw on the shore a monstrous shape, from thirty to thirty-five feet high, not unlike a swaying balloon held down by gigantic ropes, slowly making its way among the boulders. Every now and then its body bent so far over as almost to touch the ground, then it would recover itself and rise upright again, just as does a captive balloon in a strong wind. On the lower part were two enormous eyes, nearly two feet in diameter, that turned a malevolent glare upon the approaching party. The creature was "walking" (if the expression may be allowed) among the rocks, supported, after the manner of its kind, upon the thicker parts of some of its great "arms," while the others played perpetually around it, reaching out and then withdrawing, on all sides, like hungry, writhing serpents. But these were far more dangerous than serpents, for serpents are armed only with one set of teeth, nor do they attack in groups, nor do we find land snakes of sixty or seventy feet in length, as were these twisting, wriggling "arms." Not only were they nearly three times as long as the largest known boa-constrictors or anacondas, but they were armed throughout their length with "suckers"—some as large as soup plates—each of which could seize its victim as surely as a serpent's teeth; and, in addition, there were great barbed hooks that would pierce the flesh and aid the suckers in retaining anything upon which they had once taken hold. And, as this monster gazed upon

its foes, its glance was so suggestive of mingled ferocity, malevolence and strength, that those who looked upon it trembled. The whole swaying, balloon-like form was one mass of quivering rage; waves of irrepressible, inappeasable, overmastering fury seemed to shake it, and the membranous covering of the creature was ever changing colour, being now a dull, sickly green, then a cold ashen grey, giving way, in turn, to a deep violet. And all the while the great eyes that glared and watched had a look of almost supernatural cunning, as though planning some deep and well-nigh unimaginable atrocity that should annihilate its enemies. Such was the monster of the sea and rocks upon which the attacking party stood and gazed, some in perplexity, others in fascinated horror. Its hungry-seeking arms swept a circle of some hundred and twenty feet's diameter,¹

¹ Naturalists have been constrained, during recent years, to admit the existence of gigantic cuttle-fish, or devil-fish, as they are in most places called by the fisher-folk. There are many different species of the cuttle-fish family, such as the octopus, the squid, the sepia, the calamary, etc., but they are all remarkable in that they possess no skeleton; and they have neither fins to swim with, like fish, nor legs upon which to walk, like crabs and lobsters. Instead, they have a number of trailing limbs, eight or ten in all, called by most scientists "arms," which resemble so many serpents, but are furnished with suckers with which to seize and hold their prey, and, in some species, with prehensile hooks as well. Creatures of this family have been captured, reaching from 25, 30, 40, 50 feet up to 80 and nearly 100 feet in length, and portions of these are preserved in great jars and tanks of spirits in museums in London, Dublin, St. John's (Newfoundland), Halifax, Yale University (U.S.A.), and other places. The largest ever found, up to the present time (1898), was captured off the coast

and within that circle none durst venture. Presently it climbed up on to a large flat slab of rock some ten feet above the general level of the shore, and there remained, looking the while as if it meditated a spring upon its foes. These involuntarily retreated, doubting how best and safest to attack it. Meanwhile, another boat came up, bringing Monella with Ombrian, Kremna, and some others, amongst them Peter Jennings, who had resigned his position with the Karanites and taken service with Monella. He had resumed his former costume, and now appeared, thoroughly equipped and armed cap-à-pie, for the fray. Monella wore only his breast-plate by way of armour, but carried his great sword and axe by his side. It was a matter for serious consideration how, in the absence of firearms, this formidable monster was to be attacked. It is doubtful even whether fire-

of Florida in 1897. Here is a brief account of it taken from *Chambers's Journal* for August 28th, 1897 ("Science and Art" column): "Part of a large octopus, the proportions of which must throw all descriptions of such an animal by imaginative writers into the shade, was lately cast upon the beach near St. Augustine, Florida. Professor Verril, of Yale University, examined this curious derelict, and believed it to be a distinct species from all known forms, and he suggested that it should be named *Octopus Giganticus*. The part of the creature thrown up by the sea weighed six tons, and it is calculated that the living animal must have had a body with a length of 26 feet, and a girth of 5 feet, with arms 72 feet long, provided with suckers as large as dinner plates." Such a monster, "walking about" on the thicker portions of its arms, as is their fashion, would reach over 30 feet in height, and would present a picture exactly like that here drawn, its total length being, as stated, close on 100 feet. Such a creature, too, is quite sufficient to account for the stories of great sea-serpents.—*Author*.

arms, short of a small cannon or an elephant rifle with explosive bullets, would have had much effect on it ; for these creatures have no bones that a bullet might smash and so cause limbs to hang useless, and in their "pulpy" bodies ordinary bullets would produce no wound of any consequence. And for men armed only with swords and hatchets to trust themselves within reach of those long, powerful arms would be an act of suicidal folly. So they hesitated, and consulted, and considered, the while that the creature remained watching them with its great, malignant, cunning eyes, the colours that kept coming and going on its body marking its continually changing passions ; one moment full of concentrated rage and fury, the next, perhaps, apprehensive of attack, and desirous of safely reaching the water, where it would be far more formidable even than on land. There was something deeply impressive, almost awe-inspiring, in the creature's unbroken silence. Any land animal would have given vent to some kind of roar or raging scream ; a serpent would have hissed, a crocodile have snorted, and perhaps bellowed. But this monstrous mass of quivering rage uttered no sound ; only its eyes glared, and its snake-like arms twisted restlessly about hither and thither, seeking a victim to lay hold of.

Someone shot two arrows at it ; these, although they caused no wound to speak of, seemed to enrage the creature beyond endurance. It sprang suddenly off the rock, and, almost before they had had time to note its action, was within seizing distance of those nearest to it. As it happened, these were George and the doctor ; in an instant they were entangled in

the deadly embrace of one of the far-reaching arms that had darted out like a flash to grasp them. It is impossible to give an idea of the agility this unwieldy monster now displayed. Its "arms" darted about so quickly that the eye failed to follow them; a lightning flash is really the only simile that seems appropriate.

Wydale, when he saw George seized, rushed, without an instant's hesitation, to his aid, and Sydney followed him, but only to be themselves enveloped in the same horrible embrace. Then Peter, who carried a hatchet in his hand, courageously ran to Wydale's help; others, fired by these examples, did the same, and thus a general *melée* was precipitated, the like of which has surely never been seen since the days of Laocoon and his hapless sons. The scene that followed was one of indescribable confusion; the monster lay upon its side with two of its limbs fastened for an anchorage to the mass of rock it had just left, while, amongst its other long writhing arms, men, fighting furiously, with loud and frantic cries and shouts, were mixed up in an apparently inextricable tangle. They were drawn hither and thither; two or three, perhaps, bound together—almost as in a bundle—found themselves suddenly dashed against a similar group; or they might be thrown headlong to the ground, while the powerful limbs that grasped them were so tough that, except near the ends, where they tapered off almost to the size of whip-cord, they were impenetrable by both sword and axe. It was one of these fine ends that had just managed to seize George and the doctor; and Wydale had cut them free before they could be drawn far enough for the

creature to get a better hold. But, while doing so, he had himself been grasped by two other arms; and now there were perhaps two dozen of his companions in like case.

Suddenly Monella saw his opportunity; all the creature's limbs being busily engaged, he rushed in behind them and attacked the monster's neck. Holding his sword in both hands, with two slashing blows, he made a great gaping wound that laid the windpipe open, and instantly the hold of the "suckers" relaxed, the constricting arms fell away from those upon whom they had fastened, and lay upon the strand with but feeble signs of life. For in these strange creatures the holding power of the "suckers" has its centre in the force of suction in the gorge and body, and if the windpipe be either laid open or compressed, the "suction" immediately gives out. For the same reason the monster could no longer keep its hold upon the rock it had grasped for leverage, and thus, though it made efforts to turn and seize Monella—who continued to hack at the wound, making it, each moment, larger—it could only twist itself about slowly and convulsively, so that it was comparatively easy to avoid its nerveless attack. One last act of revenge, however, it still had within its power, and it made use of it. A great stream of inky-brown, evil-smelling fluid, was squirted over all within its reach, covering their faces, hands, and clothes, with a dark brown stain¹ that proved very difficult to remove, causing their eyes to smart and

¹ This is the pigment known to artists as sepia, one of the most useful and durable of colours. We are indebted for it solely to members of the cuttle-fish family.—*Author*.



Suddenly Monella rushed in behind and attacked the monster's neck.

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many to turn sick with the foul effluvium. But this was their enemy's last offensive act ; a minute later it had been hacked to pieces.

So ended the last of the two great cuttles that had been for so many years a source of terror and danger to the islanders ; for the other one was found lying dead high up on the rocks not far away. The cause of its death was not apparent ; the islanders assigned it to old age, but it was noticed that two of its limbs had been amputated. These were the two that Wydale and Dareville had cut off when they had been attacked on board the *Saucy Fan* ; possibly this mutilation may have had something to do with the creature's ultimate death, though this would not necessarily be the case. For it is a fact well known to naturalists that limbs thus amputated frequently grow again in members of this curious order.

No one had been much hurt in the encounter, therefore the rejoicing at being rid of these two monsters was not dimmed by any cause for serious regret. A few flesh wounds, caused by the terrible hooks, were the worst that had to be attended to. But there is no doubt some would have suffered severely, if not fatally, from constriction, had not their breast-plates partially protected them.

It seemed as though this unique fight—the battle with the cuttle—was destined to be but the first of a series of stirring events, for there followed quickly upon its heels two occurrences that roused interest and excitement throughout the country.

The first of these was the announcement that Vanina was engaged to be married to King Kara ;

the second was the disappearance of her brother George.

The news of the first was brought to Wydale by Sydney Dareville, who burst in upon him one day in a great state of excitement. Owen listened gloomily, but without apparent surprise. In reality it was a great, a cruel shock to him, and he found it difficult to hide his feelings.

"Do you approve of it?" he presently asked of Dareville.

"Honestly, *no*, my friend," was the emphatic answer. "But what am I to do? My sister is headstrong—or infatuated—or something. She will not listen to me. Can you not advise me in the matter?"

Wydale could only advise him to consult Monella; so they set out to seek him, and presently found him in the "Technical School" he had established in the town. During the past few months he had started many schools, institutions, manufactories, and other useful works. Amongst them was a printing-office, and already he had constructed an alphabet and grammar of the language, and had cast founts of type to correspond; and now the printing press that had come over in the *Saucy Fan* was at work printing, in the language of the country, translations of many English works, including one of the Bible. He and Dr. Manleth between them had devoted so much time and attention to this, and to instructing some of the most apt among their scholars, that there were now two or three translators at work upon various English books.

Lathes, steam engines, and machinery of various

kinds were also at work. Dynamos for the electric light, electric batteries and bells, quite a host of manufactures had been started, taking as patterns one or other of the promiscuous cargo of the brig. And, finally, new masts and other furnishings had been made ready to refit the *Saucy Fan* as a fore-and-aft schooner, so that she might take the sea at short notice, should an opportunity for leaving the island offer.

When they found him, Monella only shook his head, and said he could offer them no counsel at the moment.

"However," he said, presently, passing his hand across his forehead, as was often his habit, "perhaps Gralda can aid you here. He reads much that is written in the stars—which with me is a lost science."

So they consulted Gralda, who, in turn, consulted the stars; but the only result was to leave them even more anxious than before.

"The maiden," he said, dreamily, "is in grave danger. She hath fallen under an evil spell. But what the result will be I cannot see."

One of those most afflicted by this news was George. He burst into tears, and for many days went about sorrowful and depressed. He would not tell anyone his thoughts; but Wydale knew intuitively that the boy was sorrowing for *him* as well as for his sister; and it increased the love that had grown up between the two.

When therefore, a little later, it was found that the boy was missing, Wydale was the most upset of any. George had sought him out to ask him to come for a

sail, "as there was such a beautiful breeze;" but Owen had been engaged with Monella at the time, so the boy had announced his intention of going for a little sail alone. And, some time subsequently, he had been seen running before the breeze at some distance beyond Karanda; there all traces of him had been lost. Search-parties went out in all directions, and hunted for him wherever it was thought he would be likely to have strayed; but all returned unsuccessful; and two days and nights passed, and still neither did news come of the missing youth, nor was there any sign to throw light upon the cause of his disappearance.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE WOOD OF A HUNDRED DEATHS."

BUT to follow George.

His boat ran free before the wind, for Wydale had fitted her with a lug-sail, which George handled with dexterity. He passed the city of Karanda at some distance, and entered so fully into the enjoyment of the moment that he had left it a long way behind him before he was aware that he had passed it. He had, indeed, never before ventured so far in this direction, and now he saw, looming up before him, two or three miles away, the shores of another island. The sun shone upon a strip of tawny-coloured sand, and upon green woods that lay soft and inviting beyond the rippling water. While he was wondering at the sight, a strange object rose from the water near him, sailed along a little way above it, then dropped back into the waves. George caught a view of brilliant colours, but what the creature was he could not ascertain. It seemed to be half bird, half flying-fish; for, while its colouring resembled that of gorgeous plumage, yet it seemed to shine and reflect the rays of the sun as might the scales of a fish. Again and again it rose from the water and skimmed along in a wayward, erratic kind of flight; then it would settle once more upon the surface and remain

quiet, merely rising and falling with the motion of the waves. Many times did George stealthily approach it, holding a large landing-net ready for its capture, but in each case it would rise lightly in the air just in time to escape him. Thus he chased it, as boys do a butterfly; and, indeed, the creature was a species of marine butterfly found in these regions, where it flits from one mass of Sargasso weed to another. They seldom roam far from the weed, and it was somewhat unusual to meet with one in the open water. At last it rose with a higher and longer flight than usual and disappeared altogether from view. Then George, looking round, found himself close to the shore he had seen in the distance, and a strong desire to land and look about it took possession of him. He thereupon hauled down his sail, ran the boat ashore, and, jumping off the bow, he took the kedge and fixed it in the sand at the end of the long painter. Having thus arranged matters so that the boat was safely fastened, yet so that he could catch up the kedge, jump on board and push off quickly, if occasion should arise, he proceeded to look about him. On each hand was a long stretch of sand, backed everywhere by a wood so thick that it seemed almost impenetrable. When he drew nearer to the trees, and inspected them more closely, he perceived that nearly all were more or less unknown to him. Some of the blossoms were absolutely gigantic; the fruits, too, were larger than anything he had ever seen or heard of. Upon some of these trees he noticed great thorns of enormous size; at least there were spikes that he supposed were thorns. He examined all these wonders with

great curiosity, afraid to approach too closely, lest lurking enemies should rush forth upon him from the dense undergrowth. Presently, feeling somewhat frightened in the prevailing stillness, he went back to the boat and sat down upon it, half inclined to leave the place without further exploration. But the waves that came merrily dancing to the shore, and splashing with a cheerful, lapping sound against the side of the boat somewhat reassured him, for they seemed like light-hearted little friends in a lonely place. While thus seated he was seized with a new thought. Instead of walking along the shore, why should not he explore the place by coasting around it in the boat? That struck him as a good idea, and in a few minutes he was once more afloat; but this time he took out a pair of sculls, as being handier for his purpose than the sail. The wind had dropped almost to a calm, and the waves had become mere ripples, as he rowed leisurely along at a few hundred yards' distance from the line of coast. Every now and then he would pause and take up a pair of field-glasses, and carefully inspect the land through them; but still he saw no signs of life, save a few birds that flitted about from tree to tree, or rose for a short flight and disappeared beyond their tops. But even these birds struck him as new and strange. Presently he approached a rock that ran out some distance into the water, and upon rounding this, he came upon a little cove shut in at each end by rocks that jutted out into the sea, and at the back by wooded cliffs. And there he saw something lying upon the sand under the shade of two or three trees that here grew by themselves not far from the water's edge. Look-

ing carefully through the glasses, he made it out to be a human being, apparently a young girl asleep. Thereupon he rowed very softly close in shore ; then he saw that she was a pretty little maiden about twelve years old, dressed in the most extraordinary costume he had ever seen. But though he carefully examined the surroundings, no trace of anyone else could he perceive. And now, glancing again towards the little maiden, he saw a sight that made him tremble. Creeping stealthily towards her was a bright, orange-coloured snake, which he knew at once to be one of the most deadly and aggressive of the serpent family. He had already seen a specimen which an islander had killed, and he had heard that some of the thick woods of these islands were infested with them. They were like the fierce Hamadryad of India, that ferocious, monstrous cobra that attacks with unrelenting fury every living thing that approaches it, even the serpent tribe included ; for it lives upon snakes, and snakes alone. But in colour it resembled the "Lord of the Woods," of British Guiana, which is equally deadly and equally to be dreaded, being the only really aggressive snake of South America.¹

¹ With reference to the above it may be of interest to readers interested in natural history if I quote the statement of Mr. C. T. Spencer, an English engineer and explorer who, as a surveyor and pioneer for railway enterprise in tropical South America, has had exceptional experience of forest life out there. Referring to a former book of mine, in which I described the "Lord of the Woods," or "Bush Master" snake, as it is sometimes called, he writes to me : ". . . Permit me to add, in conclusion, that you have not made the 'Bush Master' snake (the 'Mapana' of the Alto Orinoco Indians) to be any worse

The Indians of that region regard it with the greatest dread, and relate many wondrous tales about it ; one being that it has a sting in its tail, and that sometimes, when apparently retreating, it suddenly darts backward and stings in a manner to cause death. The Dilandians call this creature Vralpa, and dread it above everything, and with only too good reason.

Such was the reptile, which, with its bright, gaudily-coloured skin, was distinctly visible even upon the tawny sand, and which was slowly but steadily approaching the sleeping girl. Quietly the boy ran his boat on the sand to which he was now close, and taking his bow and arrow in one hand and the kedge in the other, dropped softly into the water beside the bow, crept silently on to the sand and pushed the little anchor into it, then knelt down and took careful aim.

It has been already said that, as one of the principal officers of the cadet battalion that had been formed in Dilandis, George had become expert in fencing and the use of the bow and arrow, and the latter arms he always carried with him, as well as a short sword. He was only a few yards from the reptile, yet the mark was no easy one to hit, for the beast, as it wriggled along, kept swaying its head to and fro ; but its glittering, cruel eyes were fixed upon its in-

than it is ; indeed, you have omitted to mention the fact that it can sting with its tail in a way to cause death—the only snake I know of which can.” From this we may draw the curious and interesting deduction that the idea popular in some quarters that snakes sting instead of bite, may, after all, have some foundation in fact.—*Author.*

tended victim, and it neither saw nor heard the enemy behind it. Almost with his heart at his mouth, George let the arrow go. It had a wedge-shaped, sharp, steel head, and it pierced the neck of the serpent, and, passing through, pinned it to the sand. Then, rushing up, trembling with excitement, and heedless of possible danger to himself, George drew his sword, and with one neat blow cut off its head before it had wriggled the arrow out of the sand, or could turn to defend itself from its assailant. And, now that it was beyond further power of mischief, the boy sat down on the sand, overcome with horror at the sleeping maiden's narrow escape, and with the perspiration pouring from his face, yet filled with a sense of quiet triumph at his performance.

In his excitement he had called out, and the cry awoke the sleeper, who sat up and rubbed her eyes. When she saw George she started up in a fright, but he rose and pointed to the decapitated snake. When she looked upon it, she first sprang back with another cry, then seemed as though she were about to run away. But there was nowhere she could run to, for the spot was surrounded on all sides by precipitous rocks. Indeed, when George looked round, it was a wonder to him how she came to be there at all, seeing that there was no path or other visible means by which she could have come. To reassure her, he spoke to her gently in the language of the country, telling her not to be afraid, since he was no enemy, and, indeed, had just saved her from the attack of the deadly reptile that had marked her for its victim. Then she seemed to gather courage, and, looking at him with large blue eyes, inquired, in the same tongue :

“Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

“I came in my boat,” said George, pointing to it, “and seeing you lying asleep, and this snake creeping up to you, and well knowing that its bite was certain death, I landed, and was just in time to kill it before it sprang upon you.”

She shivered and looked down again in horror and aversion at the mutilated serpent. Then there came upon her face a sunny smile that was full of friendly trust and confidence. She came up to him, and, putting her hand in his, and looking at him with eyes that were now soft with tears, she said :

“You have saved me from a terrible death, and I thank you very, very much. I wish that my father were here ; he would thank you far better than can I.”

“Who is your father?” George inquired.

She drew herself up proudly, and said, eyeing him as though to watch the effect of her words :

“He is Loftra, chief of the Flower-Dwellers.”

And at that George looked round with some uneasiness, for he had heard terrible tales of these strange people ; of their ferocity, and their unrelenting hatred of all strangers ; of the terrible power which it was said they had of dealing to all who approached them a death more sudden and sure even than that which followed the bite of the deadly reptile now lying harmless at their feet.

While thinking of all this, and continuing to gaze somewhat doubtfully at the little maiden, his attention wandered to the strange dress she wore. He could not think what it could be made of ; it seemed soft as silk, and shone like satin, yet it put him in mind of nothing so much as a white lily with delicate

mauve stripes. Certainly the girl was very beautiful, with her long golden hair and perfect childish figure; and her costume seemed to suit her charms. Of adornments she had none, in the ordinary acceptation of the word; that is to say, she wore no jewellery, but twined in her hair were exquisite little knots and chains of flowers, and yet flowers that were altogether of a novel kind. Indeed, she was altogether such an unusual, fairy-like creature that he began seriously to wonder whether, indeed, she was a little fairy, and whether he had somehow stumbled unawares into a modern fairyland. At last he spoke:

"How did you come here, and how are you going to get away?"

Then she glanced around, and the troubled look came back to her face.

"Indeed, I don't know how I am going to get away," she said, "for one of my wings is broken."

"One of your wings!" he exclaimed, astonished, thinking that verily his former surmise must be correct, and that she must be indeed a fairy. Still, he could see no trace of wings upon her shoulders.

She looked about her, and went up to some articles that were lying on the ground beside her, and picked them up. Then she opened them out, and he saw that they were two beautifully-formed wings, one of which was hanging as though broken.

"Yes!" she continued, looking down ruefully at what she was holding in her hand, "you see one of my wings is broken, and I couldn't fly any farther. I just succeeded in getting over those rocks; then I saw the water in front of me, and thought I should be drowned; but I managed to wheel round and

alight on the sand without being hurt. And then I saw that I was in a place in which I was quite shut in, and from which I could not get away without my wings. So I had to stay; and I sat down to rest, knowing my people would send to search for me, and that I had only to be patient. But I got tired of waiting, and fell asleep under the trees.”

George gazed at her perplexed.

“*Are* you a fairy?” he asked.

“Not I!” she returned, with a laugh; “only a little girl.”

“Then why do you talk of flying?” he inquired.

It was now her turn to show surprise.

“Can’t you fly?” she asked.

“No; nor did I ever know anyone who could.”

“Ah, now I remember. I have heard that the people outside our island do not know how to fly; so I suppose it does seem strange to you. But then, you know, we don’t really *fly*; we can’t go very high in the air, nor for very long at a time; and I couldn’t have flown so high as to go over those trees and rocks, if there hadn’t been such a strong breeze to-day. But it was so nice to soar up higher than usual against the wind, that I could not resist it. The others would not venture, so I went up alone to have a little flight all to myself. But,” she added, sorrowfully regarding the broken wing, which she had dropped upon the ground, “it was very naughty of me, for I was warned that a great danger threatened me to-day; and so it has proved. And now I don’t know how I shall get home again; and perhaps they will not think of coming here to look for me.”

The boy’s amazement grew. He picked up the

wings and examined them intently; he was surprised to find how light they were. What material they were made of he could not understand; but they seemed very strong, yet so buoyant, that when he let go of one, it floated gently and slowly to the ground like a feather, instead of falling heavily at once, as one would have supposed from the size and apparent weight. He noticed that there were straps to bind them on the arms and shoulders; but his attention was diverted from them by the little maiden, who had seated herself on the sand and was crying bitterly; whereupon he went up to her to console her.

"There is nothing to cry about," he said; "if you want to get away from here and land on another part of the shore, you can do it easily in my boat."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Go in your boat?" she repeated, doubtfully. "I should be afraid."

"Why should you be?" he said; "I will take you safely, and land you where you please."

For a space she made no reply, but seemed considering.

"But who are you?" she presently demanded. "And what brought you here?"

"My name is George," he replied, with some importance, "and I am a prince."

But if he thought that this announcement was going to overawe her, he was quickly undeceived, for she eyed him curiously, and said:

"A prince! Not a *real* prince? Were you *born* a prince?"

Now this was a home-thrust; one not at all to

George’s liking. He hardly knew, indeed, what to reply, when, seeing the cloud upon his face, the little maiden came up to him and said kindly :

“Never mind ; if you were not born a prince, you can’t help that, you know. In our country we have no princes or princesses, or kings or queens. My father and my grandfather are the chiefs of our people ; and they are very wise—far wiser than any kings.”

To this assertion George was not disposed to give assent off-hand. He was about to argue the point when she went on :

“Never mind that now ; you have been very kind to me, for you saved my life. Prince or no prince, you seem a nice, good sort of boy ; and I will trust myself with you, if you will promise to take me round yonder rocks, and put me ashore farther along.”

“That I shall be glad to do,” was the boy’s ready answer ; and they walked together to the boat. But when they came towards it, he found it would be difficult to bring it near enough for her to step in. It was very shallow at this spot, and he looked from her to the boat, and from the boat back to her in some perplexity.

“It seems to me,” he said at last, “that I shall have to lift you in.”

“But then you will get wet,” she urged.

“Oh, that’s nothing ! I jumped into the water just now, when I landed in a hurry to kill the snake.”

So he took her in his arms and walked a little way into the water ; but his surprise was great when he found how wonderfully light she was. She seemed to be scarcely any weight at all ; and he lifted her

over the side with so little exertion that he stood looking at her with astonishment.

"Why, how light you are!" he exclaimed, "you are no heavier than a baby."

But she was as surprised as he, and took no notice of his remark.

"How strong you are—for a boy!" she said. "No wonder you were not afraid to attack the vralpa. Are all your people as strong as you?"

"Not all; but, then, some are stronger," was the diplomatic answer. Then, with a sudden change he went on, "I say, what is your name?"

"Myrla.

"Myrla! H'm; a pretty name. But Myrla what? What is your other name?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know what you mean," she said. "I have no other; nobody that I know has two names."

"I have two," George answered proudly. "My whole name is George Dareville."

She viewed him with a sort of languid curiosity.

"I have heard my people talk of King Kara and Prince Rokta, and others," she said; "but I never heard of even a king or a prince who had two names."

Now this was another home-thrust for George, though the artless maiden knew it not. He felt confused, and was relieved in consequence when she turned the subject by observing:

"Please bring my wings, and that horrid snake, too, that I may show it to my people."

He did what she asked him, lifting the remains of the reptile on two pieces of stick, and throwing them

into the bow of the boat. Then he got in himself, pushed her off, and, taking up the sculls, set off in the direction she had indicated.

Soon they rounded the corner of the little bay, and came to a long stretch of sandy shore, backed by dense woods. But in one place could be seen an opening, and from this, just when they were rowing off it, emerged a group of men who wore black masks. At sight of them Myrla gave a cry, and George, who had his back to them, looked round and stopped rowing.

“Who are they?” he asked, uneasily.

“They are my friends,” she said, “come to look for me, no doubt; but do not be afraid, for they shall not harm you.”

But George recalled the stories of the Flower-Dwellers; he remembered having been told that they wore masks; and he began to speculate whether it would not be wiser to row away instead of landing his companion.

But she urged him to turn the boat ashore.

“They shall not harm you!” she said again, with emphasis. “Have no fear; I will take care of you. Besides you *must* come and see my father, and let him thank you for what you have done for me.”

“I think,” George hesitated, “you had better tell them to halt where they are; then I can land you and row away. I do not like the look of them.”

“If you are afraid, I will,” said Myrla; “but there is no necessity.” And she called out to the approaching strangers in a language that George did not understand. Some talk ensued between them, and apparently some argument, but in the end the maskers

withdrew for about fifty yards, when George ran the boat ashore. Myrla rose, and stepping lightly to the bow, sprang out clear of the water.

"Now throw on shore those pieces of that horrid snake," she asked him.

This he did; and she turned to go to meet the masked men.

"Don't you want these things, your—your—wings?" he called after her.

She looked round and answered :

"Yes; I will come back for them directly."

And she tripped lightly to her friends who advanced to meet her. She seemed to be disputing with them vehemently, for George, watching them closely, saw her make gestures of impatience and even anger, stamping her foot, and tossing her head. One of the men offered her a black mask, but she thrust it away, and again stamped her foot with petulance and heat; and then ensued, apparently, more argument. In the end, however, she came back alone to him.

"It is all right now," she said, "you can safely land, and come with me. See," she went on, pointing to the strangers, "they have taken off their masks."

George noted that this was so; also that they were coming toward the boat with every sign of friendliness, and he eyed them with much interest. They were bearded men of middle height, apparently not very strongly built, but not ill-favoured. One fact, however, struck him, even at the first glance. It was that there was something unusual about the expression of their foreheads. But what it was he could not quite determine.

One of them came up, and looking first at the body

of the snake, and then at George, he said, in the language now familiar to the boy, but with a slightly different accent :

“We hear, young sir, that you have slain this vralpa, and so saved the life of the daughter of our chief. In that you have done us an inestimable service. It is against our laws, and against the orders of our chief, that strangers be permitted on our shores. But it is the earnest wish of the maiden that you should go with us, that her father should himself express his thanks to you. We doubt whether we are right in yielding, but since it is her wish, we have agreed to it ; if we are wrong, and our chief do not receive you as she expects, you must not blame us. We take no responsibility for the result.”

“But *I* know !” Myrla cried, imperiously. “And in this you must obey my orders ; so let us be going.”

“But what shall we do with the boat ?” George asked.

“Oh, they will see to that,” she answered. “They will draw it up and take care of it. And mind,” she went on, addressing the group, “mind you bring my wings and the dead snake.”

The men bowed with deference, and proceeded to haul up the boat, well clear of the water. Meanwhile, Myrla took George’s hand, and led him away towards the opening in the woods.

The boy naturally doubted whether he was acting wisely in allowing himself to be persuaded to accompany her on a visit to a people of whom he had heard such ill reports. But the confidence exhibited by the girl, and the friendly looks and manner of the

men, encouraged him. So they proceeded on their way, the others following.

Presently Myrla clapped her hands and laughed gleefully, as though struck with a happy thought.

"What fun it will be!" she cried.

"What will be fun?" her companion asked.

"Why, when they see me returning with a stranger," she replied. "Never for many, many years—oh! long ages, as I have been told—has a stranger been allowed to enter our country!"

"Why do those people wear masks?" he asked, "and why did they want you to put one on?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am not sure," she said, a little seriously, "whether I may tell you. Perhaps you will learn all about it by and by."

They entered a steep, gloomy path that led into the depth of the wood, and mounted towards some lofty overhanging cliffs, and George looked about him with much interest, for the trees and shrubs and flowers, all the vegetation, in fact, were strange to him. The farther they went, the larger and more extraordinary became the fruit and blossoms to be seen on every side. One in particular of these strange flowers attracted his attention. It seemed to be a gigantic orchid, and it was so beautifully marked, the colouring was so vivid, and the scent, even at a little distance, was so delicious, that he stepped towards it with the intention of examining and perhaps plucking it. But, with a loud cry of fright, Myrla darted after him and pulled him back. He turned and saw that her face, but now flushed with pleasurable excitement, was white and pinched with fear.

“Oh, do not touch it!” she exclaimed, “for it will *kill* you. See,” she went on, with a shudder.

And, taking from his hand the bow that he had brought with him, she held it out at full length, and, stretching out as far as she could, leant over and touched the lovely blossom, whereupon a bough above, armed with one of the long spiky thorns that he had noticed before, came down sharply upon the end of the bow with a blow like a hammer.

“See,” she said again, and drew back, and caught his arm. “If you had been there that would have killed you.”

George wondered greatly, and asked her to explain; but she shook her head and said only:

“You must touch *nothing* here, unless you are told you may. This is the ‘Wood of a Hundred Deaths.’”

But she refused to explain further; and they walked on for a while in silence, when George’s attention was attracted by a new wonder. This was a tree whose whole trunk was hollow and stood partly open, and in the interior could be seen what looked like a seat. Around, the sides were lined with a substance that resembled the richest velvet. It was of many lovely colours. George stepped forward to examine this fresh wonder, and again Myrla caught him and drew him back with a frightened cry.

“If you seat yourself therein,” she cried, “you will never come out alive. That horrid tree would close round you, and nothing we could do would release you in time to save you. That is another of the many ‘deaths’ the unwary meet with in this awful wood!”

A little farther on they came to a similar tree. It

was standing open as the other had been, but inside was something which George recognised as the huddled-up skeleton of a human being.

"Come along," urged Myrla, with a shiver. "That is some foolish stranger who had ventured into this wood, and sat down there for a rest."

Presently they came to an immense flower that hung, attached by a long trailing stem at each end, to a tree above, and formed a sort of swing, or rather hammock, beautifully shaped and coloured, and seemed to invite the tired wayfarer to lie in it, and swing to and fro in the shade.

"There," said Myrla, "is another deadly plant. If you lie down in that swing, it overpowers you with a drowsy scent, and then, while you lie asleep, closes over you, and you never come out alive. But after a time it opens again, and only your bones fall to the ground. See, look around beneath it."

And there, indeed, lying about, were many white-looking objects that George saw were whitened bones.

He turned with a shudder and walked on, beginning to feel a sort of creepy horror of everything around him. But the girl beside him soon began chattering away gaily, evidently amused at the surprise and curiosity written in his face as he glanced from one new and strange botanic wonder to another.

And now he saw an opening in the path in front of him that indicated that they were nearing the margin of the forest. On their way through the wood he had seen many paths branching off and winding in and out, forming a veritable maze, through which Myrla picked her way, for the most part, without hesitation.

But once or twice she, even, was at fault, and waited for her followers to come up to point out the road, whereupon she would take George's hand and lead him on in front as before.

In this way they had first ascended rising ground to a considerable height, and then descended a little, and now, on their emerging from the wood, an extensive view spread out before their gaze.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE LAND OF THE FLOWER-DWELLERS.

GEORGE found himself looking down across an extensive grassy plain that stretched away into the distance, and was surrounded on all sides by woods and groves of trees, for the most part of gigantic height and girth. The basin thus formed was dotted here and there with groups of smaller trees, amidst which flitted, in and out, what the boy at first took to be enormous swallows, but presently ascertained to be human beings skimming a little above the surface of the ground. Some of these flyers soon saw George and his companions and made their way to them, in long curved flights, skimming along a few feet from the ground, and mounting again when they sank low enough to touch it, a spring of the foot on the grass being sufficient to launch them upon a fresh swoop through the air. The resemblance to the flight of swallows, when these fly low, was very marked; or the motion might be likened to the long, graceful curves of skaters.

When the first of those who employed this mode of locomotion had come within twenty yards of George, they alighted on the ground and ranged themselves in a semi-circle, gravely scanning him. He found their silent gaze embarrassing, and stood

waiting for what would happen next. Gradually the number of these strangers was increased, as others came skimming over the ground and brought up at the edge of the semi-circle. Then Myrla went forward and addressed them in a language George did not understand; and the four men who had been following them coming up, a long colloquy ensued. At the end of it some of the "flyers" set off, running along the ground before mounting in the air, and then, once fairly started, soon disappearing in the distance. The others turned to walk in the same direction, and Myrla, beckoning to George, they all set out together.

"They tell me my father and mother have been in great trouble about me," she explained to her young friend, as they went along. "I am very sorry; and I expect I shall get a scolding. However, it cannot now be helped. But I hope they will not be *very* angry."

George acquiesced, but showed more curiosity, just then, in the "flying" than in anything else; and he looked with great interest at the "wings" of those nearest to him. They resembled Myrla's, and were fastened to the arms and shoulders with straps and buckles that were quickly and easily adjusted, many unfastening them while they walked, and slinging them over their shoulders.

George felt greatly reassured by the demeanour of all he now encountered. Not only were they friendly, but there was an almost childish gaiety in their behaviour that very quickly won his confidence. In this respect they were very different from the masked men, whose serious and almost repellent air had, at

first, rendered him somewhat doubtful of their intentions.

The little procession moved on across the plain; and, when it neared the farther end, they passed through groves of trees, amongst which were streams of running water, cascades and fountains, grottoes and shady arbours, and beautifully laid out gardens. Some of the groves they passed through bore fruit and flowers of such immense size that George gazed at them in astonishment, scarcely believing that they were real. And now from many of these great blossoms, as they swayed to and fro, some only a few feet above them, and others high in the air, little heads peeped forth, and wondering faces peered down upon them and asked what the commotion was about. From time to time some of these would emerge from their hiding-places in the colossal blooms, and throwing themselves, with outspread wings, into the air, would descend with a graceful sweep, alighting noiselessly and easily on the ground. Then, folding up their wings, they joined the crowd, eagerly asking questions of those near them.

Proceeding onwards, they came in sight of groups of buildings, one of which, from its size and style of architecture, George thought must be a palace or a temple. All its towers were shaped to resemble flowers or trees, and the ornamentation followed out the same idea. The material of the edifice itself was black and white marble, but the floral decorations were beautifully tinted to represent real flowers. At the top of a flight of steps that ascended to the entrance of this imposing structure, a group of people was collected.

"See!" cried Myrla, "there is my father, Loftra, and beside him, Felita, my mother; and on the other side you can see my grandfather, whose name is Zoreas."

And, with that, she ran forward and up the steps, and the next moment was caught up in her mother's arms. Then her father took her up and kissed her, after which there ensued some talk, which George, who remained at the bottom of the steps, could not hear. The men who had worn the masks now ascended the steps and threw before their chief the remains of the dead snake. These Loftra examined for a space, in silence, and then, coming down the steps, held out his hand to George.

"I have heard, my son," said he, "of what thou hast done for my child this day. Now is the mystery of the fate that hovered over her, of the veil we could not penetrate, cleared up. It was written in the stars that to-day a great danger threatened her; it hath been reserved for thee, by destiny, to avert that danger, and to be the first stranger that hath been admitted to our land for ages. Since, then, the great Spirit who directs all worldly affairs hath so ordained it, it is fitting that we recognise and abide by His will in this. Thou shalt find that we shall not be niggardly in our recognition of the service thou hast rendered us."

George felt a little confused at this somewhat stately welcome, and, being unused to making lengthy speeches, he contented himself with a smile and a modest, "Thank you, sir." Loftra then took his hand and led him up to his wife, who, without more ado, embraced and kissed him, whereupon

Myrla clapped her hands, saying laughingly to George :

“ There ! I told you so. Did I not say my mother and father would receive you kindly, and love you for having saved my life ? ”

George was next presented to Zoreas, a fine-looking old man with flowing white hair and beard, who regarded him with kindly grey eyes, and addressed him with much dignity. At this shouts went up from the crowd around, who had been waiting only for a sign of the old man's approval to testify their friendly feeling.

“ Now,” said Felita, “ the boy must be hungry, and must require refreshment ; let him come with us to our table.”

Then Myrla took his hand, and saying, “ I will show him the way,” led him through the portals into a courtyard, which they crossed, then passing through another gateway, they came out into a garden which George thought the most beautiful and the most wonderful he had ever seen. Here, under a large spreading awning, tables were laid out, upon which were golden platters and ewers and goblets, and a lavish display of cool, inviting fruits. And at this table, with the scent of the flowers around them, and the murmur of splashing fountains close at hand, George was soon seated before the most extraordinary banquet at which he had ever been a guest.

While eating, he had an opportunity of observing those around him. Loftra, the chief of the community, was a tall, handsome man of middle age, with fine, soldierly bearing ; while his wife, though also middle-aged, yet had a wonderfully youthful air and look.

In fact, George now began to understand what it was in the expression of these people that had at first perplexed him ; it was, he now perceived, the complete absence of wrinkles and other marks of age and care. There was in the brows, in the whole expression of their features, a calm repose, an absence of earthly passion, which, though he hardly understood it, yet he instinctively felt to be unusual, even if not unique. Zoreas, old man though he was undoubtedly, with his white hair and beard, and his bent figure, yet had the complexion and the bright eyes of a young man of thirty ; not a crease, not a line, appeared upon his lofty forehead, and the whole cast of his features was instinct with good temper and benevolence. Yet at times there would pass over them a suggestion of severity which George noticed and even wondered at. Looking at others round about him, he noted the same general characteristics ; all were handsome, calm, and free from even a hint of trouble ; and all, moreover, seemed as full of gaiety as happy, careless children.

As to what he ate and drank at this unique repast, George had but a faint idea—at least with regard to most of it. There was nothing in the way of food but bread and fruits ; but these fruits were of the most diversified description, comprising in their variety the flavours of everything under the sun, including even—so it seemed to him—the taste of meats of many kinds. For drink there were fruity beverages, cool, foaming, and of exquisite *bouquet*. Presently, Myrla, in response to his expressions of wonder, asked him playfully whether there was any fruit that he *did* know, whereupon George thought of grapes, and managed to

make them understand what he meant. Myrla clapped her hands, and said :

“ You shall have part of one with me.”

This reply puzzled George not a little, but he opened his eyes still wider than before, when, a little later, there was placed before him what looked like *one* immense grape as large as a melon. From this Myrla cut two slices, one for him and one for herself, and when he had tasted it he found that it was indeed nothing else than an enormous grape.

It was the same with many other of the fruits. Nectarines so large that only a portion could be placed on a dish, peaches and plums as large as pumpkins, and numberless others, all upon a scale that to the boy seemed like a dream of Brobdingnag.

Now when this function was concluded, and George had bathed his face and hands, and had rested for a while, he was led into an apartment in which only Myrla and her parents and her grandfather were present.

Here Zoreas was seated upon a chair of state, with Myrla's father and mother, one on each side of him. George stood before them, Myrla by his side, holding his hand, as if to give him courage.

“ My son,” said Zoreas, “ it hath been delegated to me to decide upon what reward we shall offer thee for the service thou hast this day rendered us. By the will of the great Spirit, the Lord of the Woods and Flowers, whom we worship, it hath been given unto thee to perform this service ; it is for us, therefore, to bow to what is here so plainly indicated. Doubtless, it hath been so ordained that we might render thee some special service in return. Say,

then, what can we do for thee? If there is aught that thou desirest, that is in our power to grant, we will readily comply with thy request."

At this George felt embarrassed, and scarce knew what reply to make. He turned over in his mind all the articles that he would most wish to have. But then nearly all were such as it was not likely these people could supply, unless they were really fairies; but that he had by this time decided they were not. Probably his greatest wish, at the time, was for a repeating rifle and a good supply of cartridges; but that, he knew, they could not give him, and this applied to everything he tried to think of. While he hesitated, Myrla looked at him and smiled.

"You seem to have lost your tongue, Prince George. Shall I ask something for you?"

But George remained grave and thoughtful, and presently looked up and sighed, and then it was seen that the tears were in his eyes.

"There is only one thing, sir, that could really make me happy," he said, addressing Zoreas, "and that is, that my sister should marry Mr. Wydale, he who has been so kind a friend to me. I know that he loves her very dearly, and had quite hoped to marry her, but now she is going to be married to King Kara, a man I don't like at all."

"Thou thinkest, then," responded Zoreas, "that it would be better for thy friend and thy sister that he should marry her?"

"Of course I don't know, sir," George answered, modestly. "I'm only a boy, and have no experience of such matters. But when I see how sorrowful and

depressed he looks, I can't help wishing that my sister would love and comfort him."

Zoreas eyed the boy for a space in silence; then he answered, kindly :

"Thy thoughts do thee credit, my son. They show that thy heart is well inclined. Now it may be that we can be of service to thee in this matter, for we know all that is going on in these islands, though we admit none of the other inhabitants into our domain. We have watched the actions of that strange chief, Monella, in his warfare against King Kara; and we know how that King Kara, having failed to gain his ends in open war, hath resorted to chicanery; how that he and his sister Morveena, by illicit arts and occult spells, have found favour in the sight of the rulers and counsellors of Dilandis, and have fooled them to believe in their good faith. For Kara is skilled in many hidden mysteries; he knoweth many of the secrets that belong to us, the Children of the Woods and Flowers; he and his priests and astrologers are learned, too, in the lore of the stars. But if they know much, we know more; we have secrets that Kara hath not yet penetrated, and that he would give much to have unveiled. Herein lieth our power to aid thee, and what we *can* do we will willingly."

At this George, who had been staring gloomily on the ground, glanced up with a cheerful smile. Then, stepping forward, he impulsively seized and kissed the sage's hand, and, bowing over it, replied :

"Oh, sir! if you think it possible, and can help me in this matter, then indeed will I be grateful, and shall thank you as long as I live!"

Seeing that the boy was crying, Myrla's mother drew him gently towards her, and bade him seat himself on a stool beside her ; then pressing him to her, with her arm around his neck, she said affectionately :

"Poor boy! He has no mother, and only his sister to love and care for him!"

At this George looked up in wonder.

"I have a brother, too," he said ; "but how did you know I have no mother?"

Zoreas smiled.

"I have already told thee," he observed, "that we know many things that pass in the outer world. The present and the past are written in the stars; it is only the future that is hidden from us; and even as to that, we can at times read sufficient to be, to some extent, a guide to those who walk in darkness. Now, in order to help thee, it is necessary that we consult the stars. This will require at least one night; perhaps several nights. Rest here, then, in content, until we can discover what advice to give thee; then shalt thou return in more hopeful mood to thine own people."

"Thank you, sir," rejoined George simply. "But my sister and all of them will be so anxious about me!"

"No matter," returned the sage, gravely; "these things are of more importance to thee and to them than is their temporary anxiety. Besides, if necessary, if thy stay should be prolonged, I can despatch a message. We will see to-morrow. Meantime, I give thee over to the charge of my granddaughter, who brought thee hither, and who will find plenty to amuse and interest thee."

"But what about the boat?" George asked.

"It hath been safely hidden away, and will be well cared for."

Then George was led away by Myrla, but not before he had received another embrace from her kind mother.

"Be comforted, my child," she whispered, "for if *we* cannot aid thee, then none on earth can; and we will do all that lies in our power."

Outside, many of Myrla's playmates were awaiting her; and to these she introduced her new acquaintance, who quickly became at home with them and joined their games. They wanted to teach him to "fly," and tried to do so; but the attempt proved a failure though it gave them plenty of amusement. The fact was, as he subsequently learned, all these people were by nature very light-boned; and it was partly that, and partly long practice, that enabled them to skim along above the ground in the manner he had seen. There was also another reason, namely, that their "wings" were composed of a tenuous substance that grew upon certain trees in the woods about them. It possessed great buoyancy; so much so that the wings would almost float about by themselves, and even, with a puff of wind behind them, carry along a certain amount of dead weight attached to them. The most familiar illustration probably would be the puff-ball of the dandelion, only that this does not possess the same tenacity and strength.

But in this, as in everything else, as George soon discovered, this strange people pressed into their service all the flowers and plants about them. By some secret treatment they could render blossoms, no matter

of what size, strong and durable, almost everlasting ; and, in fact, they made of them materials for dress and other purposes. Thus George learned, with wonder, the secret of their unique garb, for they were all made from flowers ; and when he had thought, on first seeing Myrla, that her dress resembled a lily, he had accidentally hit the truth.

In other matters it was the same. These people were the only consistent vegetarians he had ever met. They needed nothing more for their daily sustenance, or their existence, as a separate and isolated community, than that which grew around them. They had, after great and arduous botanical research, so cultivated, and in some cases altered the character of the shrubs and trees and flowers, as to evolve from them developments that would have caused astonishment in any other part of the world. After long ages of this cultivation, small blossoms had become gigantic; fruits that we think large were Lilliputian by comparison, and the giant blossoms their woods now produced could, by some process known to themselves, be rendered so lasting that they would, if desired, remain year after year unaltered on the tree on which they grew.

This was most clearly conveyed to George's mind later in the day. After the evening meal, Myrla said to him :

" There is a clear moon to-night ; let us go out and play."

With that she led him out of the palace, under the trees of the groves surrounding it, and lo ! most of the great blossoms that swung from them were lighted

They swayed to and fro in the evening breeze

like gigantic Chinese lanterns ; and as the two passed beneath, Myrla would give utterance to a little cry, whereupon sleepy heads would pop forth from these giant illuminated flowers, and lazily ask what she wanted.

"We are going to play to-night," she said, "the moon will soon be up ; and we have a stranger here who would like to see our games. He cannot remain with us for long, so come and play with him to-night."

George gazed wonderingly around ; on all sides of him he could see long avenues of trees with their great flowers lighted up, showing off to great advantage their soft and varied colouring, and the more he looked the more he marvelled.

"Why," said he to Myrla, "do they stay up there in those great flowers, instead of living in the palace or in the pretty houses that I see around?"

But she only laughed.

"It is our nature," she returned, "for we are Flower-dwellers ; and we love better to live in the flowers, where we can swing to and fro in the cool fresh air, than in stifling buildings on the ground. There are about us houses for all who desire to dwell in them ; but it is our nature to prefer to sleep among the trees."

In response to Myrla's invitation, many little beings came floating down, in their graceful way, to the ground ; some among them carried in their hands small lanterns which gave them somewhat the appearance, at a distance, of enormous fire-flies.

Presently it was proposed to take George for a flight, and when the moon, which was nearly at its



Thus did George get his first personal experience of their method
of flying. [p. 301.]

full, had risen high enough to light up the plain, these laughing children were to be seen bearing him up with what may be termed long skips of many hundred feet in length above the ground ; and thus did George get his first personal experience of their mode of flying. He found it a most delightful movement, especially after he had surmounted his first fear that they would suddenly drop him to the ground. From the moment that he gained that confidence he found a great enjoyment in the pastime.

Several days passed more or less in the same fashion ; the while that, for a space each day, Myrla's parents would walk with George and gravely converse with him, and give him advice about his future. They soon learned from him that he was an enthusiastic pupil of Dr. Manleth's ; also that the doctor was devoting much time to a study of the botanical productions of the islands.

At this Loftra smiled.

"In that case," said he, "we can give thee some useful hints ; before thou leavest us, we will impart to thee some of nature's secrets that are known to us—enough, at all events, to encourage thee in thine after-life. True it is that many of these secrets are connected with the special trees and shrubs that we have cultivated in this island throughout long cycles ; yet do we know that there are other parts of the world also in which most of these are to be found by those who diligently search for them, and this will set before thee an aim for study. Thou wilt know that there are discoveries to be made of which the outer world does not so much as dream !"

Five days passed thus, and still each morning

George was told that the stars were not yet propitious ; but, in the meantime, he was informed that a message had been sent to his friends advising them that he was safe and would return shortly. This eased the boy's mind, and allowed him to enter more fully into his surroundings, which, indeed, made an impression never afterwards to be obliterated. And ever since, and for years to come, he has recalled and will recall again and again the days and nights he passed with this strange community.

Thus, in the evening, seated beside Felita, pressed affectionately to her, while Myrla sat at her other side, he would listen to an (to Myrla) oft-told tale the kindly matron would relate to him—the wonderful legend of the origin of the Flower-Dwellers ; just as, in our nurseries, loving mothers tell their children tales of fairyland. All around him he could see through avenues of trees the arboreal dwellings of the inhabitants, most of them lighted up, and every now and then some of the dwellers in them, carrying their little lanterns, flitting down or skimming round hither and thither through the twilight, or in the deeper shadows of the night.

And this is the legend that she told :—

“ In the beginning we were called Children of the Light, beings that flitted about upon the outside of the globe in an Elysium of delight. We floated to and fro upon the surface of the atmosphere of this planet, even as birds fly above the surface of the sea, and sometimes dive down into it. But on an evil day Alostra, our queen, fell in love with one of the Sons of God, who guarded the gates of heaven, and enticed him from his duty. And then a great curse fell upon

us. We became heavier, and were doomed to sink down into the air, and there swim about like the birds, or as fish swim in the sea. But worse came than this, for Alostra remained obdurate, and would not petition for forgiveness, and so she sank lower and lower, and all those belonging to her, until at last they could no longer even fly in the air, but sank and grovelled on the earth, and became like the lobsters and the crabs compared with the fish that swim above them.

“Yet still,” continued Felita, “we retained many of our former attributes as compared with the inhabitants that we found existing on the earth. We alighted upon what was then the highest land upon the surface of the globe, and that was the lofty peaks of the land called Atlantis, which then dominated the whole world. But that nation ruled it by cruelty, and bloodshed, and evil passions; and we, though we were cast out from our former blissful state, had no sympathy with what we found around us. And when we learned all this, and realised more keenly than ever all that we had lost, many amongst us shed so many tears, and of such concentrated grief, that they watered the whole of the ground around and where they fell they budded into the trees and flowers you see about us. In no other regions of the world—so we believe—do you find such wonderful vegetation as we have here, for, although some of the seeds have accidentally been carried to other lands, yet here are to be seen all the most wonderful of nature’s secrets.

“And while Atlantis dominated the world, as at that time she did, we, by virtue of the secrets we discovered and the power they gave us, dominated her;

for in her midst was our domain, a great unapproachable mountain, defended by woods that no man durst penetrate, except on pain of death. Through generations we looked down with disgust and pity upon the cruel passions by which those surrounding us were actuated, for all their conquests were achieved by hatred, and cruelty, and ambition. And, when the inevitable retribution came, and Atlantis, the mistress of the world, sank beneath the waves—all except the upper lands—we were unharmed, and looked on in serenity at what befell them. We felt no pity and no fear, for we knew that it had been written in the stars that we should not sink with them, and for their lost ambitions we had no sympathy whatever.

“Ever since, this little nation of descendants from the Sons of the Gods has maintained itself against the rest of the world, and has retained to-day many of the attributes of our ancestors. We are so light in weight that with very little assistance we can fly in the air; but ah! never again, until we pass through the gates of death, may we fly so high as we once did. Thus we came to be called Flower-Dwellers.

“And thus you can understand, my child,” Felita added, “why we have preserved ourselves as a nation separate from the outer world. It is an inexorable law with us that none from it shall set foot here, much less intermingle with us. Death, quick and certain, is the fate of all who have attempted it. The very woods around us are full of traps for rash adventurers.”

“Yes, I know,” said George, and shuddered; “but still,” with a sudden thought, “it seems to me strange that, with so much knowledge, you have not found a remedy for a serpent’s bite.”

This remark had been suggested by a talk he had had not long before with Dr. Manleth, who had informed him that not all the science of the world had yet succeeded in discovering an antidote for snake bite.

"Oh ! that is simple enough," replied Felita, smilingly. "That is one of the smallest of our secrets ; only this child, situated as she was, could not obtain the antidote in time. We carry many of our simples with us ; but we cannot carry everything."

"I see," said George. "I suppose, then, that you do not fear these serpents upon your own ground ?"

Felita shook her head.

"No, except that, of course, they are a nuisance ; and sometimes they might bite young children unawares, who might die before we found out what had happened. For that reason we encourage the growth of trees that keep snakes away. None ever make their way here through the woods ; they may approach our outer shore, but they never get much farther. Then," she added, looking at Myrla with ever so slight a touch of severity in her glance, but, at the same time, patting her affectionately on the head, "our little Myrla would never have been in danger, if she had not disobeyedly gone beyond the bounds that she knew she and her playmates are restricted to."

Then Myrla, half laughingly, half seriously, hid her face in her mother's lap with much show of penitence, and promised not to disobey again. And her mother, bending down to kiss her daughter's hair, replied :

"I trust not, my child, for next time there will be no little friend George to rescue you."

Thus did some days pass, until, on the morning of the fifth, George was once more sent for for a private talk with Myrla and her parents. He had already learned that Zoreas had been the former chief of the Flower-Dwellers, but that, with increasing years, he had found the responsibility too great, and had resigned his position to his son. For Loftra, George had a high regard ; he saw that he ruled his people with love and wisdom ; and the ex-chief Zoreas was on all sides equally beloved, for he had been a wise and gentle ruler in the past. And George marvelled greatly, pondering these things, how it could have come about that this kindly, good-natured people could have gained such a terrible name with the Dilandians.

This riddle was now about to be, to some extent, explained to him.

"We have carefully considered," began Loftra, addressing George, "all that hath been revealed to us about thy sister, not only of her present situation, but of her past. She hath been led astray ; but her heart is still full of kindly impulses, else would we not assist her. At this moment she stands in serious danger ; what will be its outcome we cannot tell ; we can only do what seems best to us to help you ; but that will be more than we have ever done before for mortal, so far as I know our history."

This was not such comfort to George as he had hoped for ; he had looked for something more pronounced.

"Gralda told me so much," he almost wailed. "He said he could not help us. Can you, then, do no more than Gralda ?"

"We can," was the grave reply; "but it depends upon the great Spirit, the Lord of the Woods and the Flowers, whether our efforts will be efficacious. Remember once more we cannot pierce the veil of the future; we can only peer into it, and dimly see vague disclosures that, to different eyes, take different shapes. It may be that the interpretations we place on these may be correct; but we can never be sure. However, we hope it may eventuate that our aid to thee may prove a fitting return for the service thou hast rendered us in preserving the life of our sweet child Myrla. I have heard that thou takest a great interest in all that appertains to science. Now, therefore, will I do two things for thee; I will give thee that which we have never yet given to a stranger, that which shall help thee in thy contention with King Kara. I will also show to thee some of the great prizes that lie before the successful worker in the sciences. I will show to thee, in fact, some of the great secrets of the "Children of the Woods and Flowers."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME SECRETS OF THE WOODS AND FLOWERS.

"THOU must understand," continued Loftra, "that I do not expect that thy young mind can fully comprehend all I now say to thee. Yet in the future thou wilt remember and perhaps better understand a part of that which now seems beyond thy grasp. For, if thou art a zealous worker in the cause of science, it will be a great help to thee to know the possibilities that lie before thee. I have already stated that King Kara is well-versed in certain of the secrets that belong to us; but all that he knows is small, indeed, compared with what we know. He knows, for instance, a subtle poison by which, with a mere scratch upon the skin, he can cause a trance so like to death that few can discern between the two. He can also quickly recall his victim from that trance, should he so wish. Further, he hath discovered another wondrous secret known to us, by which he can, in certain circumstances, control another's will. Now I know that he hath presented to thy sister a certain ornament which he hath persuaded her to wear round her neck. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir!" replied George, eagerly, "that is true."

Loftra drew from a pouch attached to his belt a small disc or locket; it was made with perforations

on each side, like those constructed to contain scented woods and other perfumes.

"Inside the locket that he hath given to thy sister," Loftra proceeded to explain, "there is something like unto this disc; and by this means he hath, with devilish art, controlled her will. Art thou listening, my son?"

"Certainly, sir," George answered. "And I think I begin to understand."

"Now I will illustrate the action of this curious talisman. Myrla, whisper to me something that thou desirest our young friend to do."

Myrla whispered something in her father's ear, and then laughingly stood aside as though awaiting the result.

"My son," Loftra then resumed, "my daughter hath desired that thou shouldst do a certain thing. I command thee to do it."

But George could only gaze at the speaker in inquiry; he did not guess what was required of him.

But Loftra smiled.

"Thou seest," he said, "that at present I cannot command thy will. Now take this disc and hold it in thine hand."

George did as directed, and stood waiting for what would happen next.

"I now again command thee," the chief continued, "to do what was just now in my mind."

George thereupon, like one walking in his sleep, went up to Felita, and, taking her hand, kissed it respectfully; while Myrla, bursting into childish laughter, and clapping her hands, exclaimed:

"That is what I asked my father to make you do."

"Now, thou seest," continued Loftra, "how subtle is the power that lies hidden in that disc. There emanates from it an influence that thou canst not detect. It has no odour of any kind, by which thou canst perceive its presence. For know," he went on with emphasis, and holding up one finger at the boy to point his words, "there are many gaseous elements in nature that can affect the brain without our being conscious of them through the senses. Our sense of smell is, at best, extremely limited. The animals, the birds of the air, and still more insects, are much more gifted in this way than human beings suspect. Animals and insects can detect scents altogether beyond a man's power of perception. And now I will give thee a further instance of this, which thou shouldst remember all thy life. Come with me."

Then the four proceeded for some distance through the woods, till they came to a bush on which were brightly-coloured blossoms. Each of his companions picked one of these in passing, but George, not being bidden to do the same, refrained. Passing on, they came to a curious-looking tree of a peculiar, deep, reddish purple tint; the leaves, too, were purplish, and there was a small, deep-coloured fruit, not unlike elder-berries.

"Break off a twig," directed Loftra, "and hold it in thy hand."

George did as he was told; but no sooner had he done so, than he was seized with a deadly nausea. He could perceive no odour, yet he felt sick, and reeled with a death-like faintness. Indeed, he would have fallen had not Loftra caught him. Snatching

the twig from his hand, he threw it far away, and fanned him with the blossom he had just plucked. Then George revived, and in a few seconds had quite recovered; yet was he conscious of no scent or odour from the blossom that had been waved to and fro before his nose.

"Thou seest!" observed Loftra, "that there are powers and agencies in nature of which thou hast, hitherto, never so much as dreamed; no, nor all thy scientific men. Hadst thou continued longer to hold that twig in thine hand, thou wouldst at this moment have been dead. It did not affect us, because we carry the antidote in our hands, and thou hast seen how quickly it acted as a cure in thine own case. Yet thou knowest that, from first to last, thy sense of smell was not affected."

"That is true, sir," George replied. "Ah! how I wish that you would show all this to my friend, Dr. Manleth!"

Loftra shook his head. "That cannot be; none of thy friends may enter here."

At this George would have entreated, but Loftra, with a wave of the hand that meant there should be no further argument, turned towards the palace. Arrived there, he again addressed the boy in the same serious strain:—

"I have shown thee several wonders that have surprised thee. I could show thee hundreds; but it suffices only to convince thee of our great knowledge. Thou hast seen enough to teach thee what secrets nature has for those who seek her; enough to convince thee that in what I am now about to say I may be trusted. Now, here is a small disc like that I

showed thee. Thou must take this, open the large locket that thy sister wears about her neck, and withdraw from it the disc thou wilt find therein. Thou must throw it into the sea, or where no one is likely to recover it. Thou must then put this disc in its place. If thou canst do this without Kara's knowledge, then shall thy sister recover the full control of her own will, and shall see Kara as he is, and not, as at present, with a dreamer's eyes. Now I will explain to thee how to open her locket."

And Loftra produced from his pouch a locket exactly like that given to Vanina by King Kara, and at sight of it the boy gave a cry of wonder.

"Yes," continued Loftra, who had divined his thoughts, "it is an exact counterpart; and now to show thee how to open it."

This done, he went and opened a cabinet, and took from it a beautifully carved ebony casket.

"Now," he went on, regarding the boy, if possible, more gravely than ever, "this is what we have never before given to a stranger, so far, at least, as I know our annals. This thou must carry carefully, and give into the hands of thy friend Monella, who will know how to deal with it. But first thou must give me thy solemn promise that thou wilt make no attempt to open it, for, if thou dost, the consequences will be disastrous."

"I promise solemnly," was George's answer.

"And I trust thee to keep that promise. And now that is the best that we can do for thee; and may the great Spirit whom we serve give His blessing upon the result."

He remained silent for a while, as though lost in

thought; and then, looking straight before him, began again in dreamy fashion, as though talking to himself.

"Monella! Strange being who knows not himself, for he hath lost his memory."

"Lost his memory?" George exclaimed. "Why, he seems to know almost everything."

"Boy, I spoke not to thee," said Loftra, coming out of his abstraction; "but it doth not matter. Thou hast heard; perhaps some day thou wilt understand. And now to-morrow morning thou must depart. Some of my followers shall guide thee through the wood and accompany thee in one of our canoes to see thee safely within sight of Karanda. There seek thy sister, and manage carefully to observe my directions. If thou hasten on thy road, and tarry not by the way, thou shouldst arrive at an opportune time. So is it written."

George poured out his thanks, and would have kissed the other's hand, but Loftra turned and left the apartment before he could approach him.

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The next morning George set out on his return. There was a tender leave-taking between him and those who had shown him so much kindness; and at parting Myrla whispered to her father, and then, coming shyly up to George, kissed him and ran away.

"Remember," said Loftra finally to the boy, "that thou must never return; nor must any of thy friends set foot upon our shores. If they do, certain death awaits them."

"But why," asked George regretfully, "why, after treating me with so much kindness, should you wish to kill my friends?"

"It is the law of our land, and is irrevocable," Loftra answered, with more sternness than he had yet shown. "If thou art wise, thou wilt so regard it. Farewell."

The men he had met on the shore on landing accompanied him through the woods. He passed, with a shudder, those deadly woodland wonders that had been pointed out to him, and saw again the bones of some of the victims lying whitening upon the ground. When they reached the shore, he found his boat awaiting him in charge of two men, who had also a canoe of their own. They had brought with them the ebony casket, which they had first carefully wrapped up, and then hidden away under a seat, and so they informed him. There was a fresh and favourable breeze, as Loftra had predicted. All then embarked, hoisted their sails, and were soon sailing towards Karanda.

On nearing the city, the men in the canoe gradually fell behind, and finally took down their sail, and watched him till he had arrived within a short distance of the harbour. Then, when he looked round, they waved their hands, turned their canoe, and paddled away.

Now when he arrived at the city, he found many persons assembled to receive him; they had seen him in the distance, and were curious to know what had happened to him in his absence. But he would tell them nothing, and, learning that his sister was at the palace, he made his way thither.

Kara's palace was a noble-looking edifice, standing upon a rock that rose from the sea. Perhaps of all the stately buildings in those islands, there was none more gratifying to the sight of those who could appreciate the beautiful. At each end great towers of fine proportions raised their heads majestically into the air, looking down in silent grandeur upon all about them.

But the sight was lost on George, who sighed while mounting the broad steps that led up to the entrance. He passed through the halls and galleries to seek Vanina. On his way he met many persons, who all questioned him, but he proceeded with but a brief word or two, till he came to the rooms Vanina occupied. Here he was stopped by some ladies in waiting, who informed him that Vanina was sleeping, and would have detained him till she awoke. But he remembered Loftra's words that, if he tarried not, he would arrive at a favourable moment, and he saw in the fact that she was asleep a fulfilment of the prediction. This was his opportunity; so, saying that he would go in to see her and stay with her until she should awake, he stole in softly on tip-toe, and was soon beside her.

Vanina was lying sound asleep upon a cushioned divan. Her chamber was one of the finest in the palace; its walls were exquisitely decorated, and one of the doors opened upon a balcony that overhung the sea, and commanded a view that extended to Dilandis. She lay with her head turned towards an open window, and a gleam of sunlight just lighted up her face and hair.

George hesitated but for a few seconds to assure

himself that she was really asleep, and that there was no one near to watch him. Then, very softly, he opened Kara's locket, and there, as he had been assured, lay a disc exactly like that given him by Loftra. He made the exchange, closed the locket, stole to the balcony, and threw into the sea below the disc that he had taken out. Then he returned to his sister's side, and seated himself noiselessly, to wait patiently for her awakening.

And while he sat and looked at her, the boy was shocked at the change that he there saw. For Vanina was indeed greatly altered. She was pale and haggard, the rosy flush that had been one of her greatest charms had left her face. When awake, too, one could see that her eyes had lost their sparkling brightness, and her manner its old vivacity. She moved, and spoke, and acted like one in a dream; or as one who waits at intervals for directions or commands from some absent master.

George felt his eyes suffuse with tears; he recalled her as he had seen her but a few weeks ago, and he felt a rising anger against King Kara; he began to comprehend more clearly what Zoreas and Loftra had said concerning him, and the arts by which, as they declared, he had influenced Vanina.

Presently she woke up, and, seeing him beside her, uttered a startled cry. For a brief space she gazed at him, unable to decide whether she saw him in reality or was still dreaming. But he sprang quickly towards her, and the next moment was clasping her in his arms.

"I am so glad to see you back, little brother," she exclaimed presently, holding him at arms length, and

keenly scrutinising his face to assure herself that he was well. "I thought I should have died with anxiety and grief, until your message came ; and even then we knew not what to think, whether to trust to it, to believe you were really safe."

"I have been safe, dear sister, and with kind friends; so you need not have troubled so."

"But *where* have you been?" she asked, "and with what friends? And how can you have here kind friends who are unknown to us?"

"I may not tell you yet, dear sister," he replied, with a wise shake of the head. "Another time. But I must hurry away now; I have to see Monella; I have something I was strictly charged to hand to him."

"What is it?" she inquired.

"That also I may not tell you. Though, indeed," George added, "I do not know myself, beyond the fact that it is a small box."

She pressed him closely, but he adhered to his instructions, though he found it hard to do so, for, boy-like, he was almost bubbling over with the adventures he had passed through.

To turn the talk, he inquired about the others, and was told that all was well with them.

"And Mr. Wydale, is he well?" And he eyed his sister half-reproachfully. He expected to hear her shelve this inquiry with some pleasantry; but for, perhaps, the first time in his references to Wydale, she looked confused. Her pale face flushed, and she avoided the boy's frank look.

"I fear he is not well," she murmured. "I saw him a few days ago. I went over to Dilandis on account

of you. All there were searching for you, and he came to talk to me of you, and told me how terribly concerned he was. He is very fond of you. I remember his saying, when I begged him to do all he could to find you, 'I require no urging, for, if anything should happen to George, I should lose all I have left in the world to love.'"

She sighed and said no more. George viewed her thoughtfully. He felt half-resolved to tell her something of what was in his mind. Yet he doubted whether it would be prudent, and whether, too, it would be well received; for "grown-up people," as he was aware, do not listen very attentively to a boy's ideas upon such matters. And, indeed, a week or two ago he would not have ventured to say a word upon the subject, whether to his sister or anyone else. But that time seemed now long ago. He seemed to be much older—years older—now; for a few days of thrilling and altogether unforeseen adventure will often have that effect upon us all—and upon young people as well as upon their elders. At last George made up his mind.

"Sister," he began, and then he stopped, for his voice trembled a little, and he felt somewhat frightened. He knew Vanina's imperious spirit, and how she had often snubbed him when he had ventured an opinion that displeased her. But there came into his memory Wydale's sorrowful face, with its expression of world-weariness, and he suddenly took courage, and determined that, for his sake, he would now go through with what he had begun. "Sister, do you know why Mr. Wydale looks so ill and so sorrowful—or have you never given it a

thought? Don't you remember when we first came here—on board the *Saucy Fan*—even the days when we first were anchored here? Ah, those were happy days. *He* looked happy, *you* looked happy, and *I* was happy too. But now," the boy concluded, with a sigh, "no one seems happy. I know Mr. Wydale is not; I am sure *you* don't look happy; and *I* can't be, seeing you two so different."

It was a long speech, and a difficult one for the boy to make, and he watched her anxiously to see the outcome, feeling that, if it failed, his little stock of eloquence would not hold out. But it did not fail, for Vanina burst into tears, and hid her face upon his shoulder.

"Do I recollect?" she sobbed. "Shall I ever forget? Why do you remind me *now*, when our happiness has gone from us, and can never be regained?"

"Why not?" George boldly answered. "Mr. Wydale is the same, and you are not yet—married—sister. Perhaps—perhaps—"

"Hush, George. It is too late. Do not speak any more about it. I see now—I seem to see more clearly to-day than I have seen before—that I have behaved badly towards my best friends. I seem to have awakened from a fevered dream, and now see everything in a different light. Why is this, I wonder? How strange that you should speak to me just when this new feeling has come over me. What does it mean?"

She rose and walked restlessly up and down the room, while her young brother regarded her in some perplexity. Had the new "charm" begun to work, as had been promised? If so, perhaps the less he

now said or did the better, else might he say or do something to obstruct its influence. So he rose and prepared to leave.

"I was almost forgetting that they are anxious about me over there as well as here," he said, with affected cheerfulness. "Good-bye, now, sister. What message shall I give to Sydney and Idelia, and—Mr. Wydale?"

She advanced to him, and placing her hands upon his shoulders, and looking keenly into his eyes, made answer:

"Tell them, George, that I shall not be long behind you, and that, when I come, I return to stay amongst those I know to be my friends, and to come back here no more."

George fixed his eyes on her inquiringly, trying to read in her face whether this new resolve would be a lasting one; and, when he saw her flushing cheeks, and her eyes flash with something of their former light, his spirits rose.

"I will gladly tell them that," he said, "and I know they will all be overwhelmed with joy to hear it. And come quickly, sister dear. I shall not be happy till you have returned to us, and I see you and Mr. Wydale good friends as you used to be."

And with that he left her, and, hastening to the harbour, regained his boat, more light-hearted than he had been for many months.

In due course he reached Dilandis, where he was warmly welcomed on all sides, and by Idelia as cordially as any. He remembered this afterwards, and recalled with gratitude her affectionate greeting

when, next morning, terrible news spread through the land.

But now he sought Monella, and, first delivering the casket, proceeded to give to him and Sydney and Wydale an account of all that he had seen and done.

CHAPTER XXV.

"VANINA DEAD!"

"VANINA dead!" Such was the sad and startling rumour that was noised throughout the land on the morning after the boy's return. It is scarcely possible to give a notion of the impression everywhere produced. The whole community stood aghast; the daily routine of life was checked; men, women, and children alike had no heart to pursue their occupations. The fisher-folk stood idle, and their boats rocked empty in the harbour; with the tillers of the soil, the artificers, with the schools, the workshops, the printing-office—everywhere it was the same; work was suspended, and people hung about in groups discussing in low, hushed tones the dreadful news.

And this was only natural; for, though Vanina had not done much of late to endear herself to the Dilandians—had, indeed, by her engagement to King Kara estranged many former friends—yet now all thought only of the good in her. They remembered how she had come amongst them at a time of national despondency, and had, by her brilliant heroism, done much to inspirit their fighting men, and lead them on to victory. Then there was the cargo of the *Saucy Fan*, and the use it had been put

to ; the credit for this had been ascribed principally to her, and, when they thought of what they owed to her, a deep distrust arose of Kara, and a murmur that speedily became an insistent craving for revenge. For there was a general belief that Vanina could not have come fairly by her death, and treachery was suspected by the people. Only the day before, her young brother George had seen her, talked with her, and left her, to all appearance, strong and well ; yet, but a few hours later, it was said that she was dead—had died so suddenly that there had been no time to send for her brothers even. How could this be ?

It was stated by King Kara and his friends that she had died of heart disease—“caused, probably, by the excitement of her brother’s return.” And her friends were invited to come and satisfy themselves that this was so. And it was difficult to controvert this statement, which had much of plausibility about it ; and what ground was there for the feeling of distrust that was abroad ? “Why,” some asked, “should Kara do aught against the life of one who, in a very short time, was to become his wife ? She had for some time said openly she meant to marry him ; why, therefore, should he conspire against her life ?” This was a difficult question to reply to, a perplexing fact to explain away. But the majority would not wait to explain or argue ; they were suspicious, and began to call for “vengeance,” and ominous rumours flew about of a renewal of the war. And in many places men were to be seen cleaning up their armour, sharpening their swords, and looking to their bows and arrows, quietly preparing for the outbreak which they believed inevitable.

It sufficed for them that the one they had regarded as their Warrior - Queen — though never actually crowned—had died in Kara's country in a sudden, mysterious, suspicious manner. For that there must be a reckoning with King Kara.

It was in this mood that Sydney Dareville found himself while he sat cleaning up his revolver and regretfully counting over the four or five cartridges he had left, and wishing, again and again, that they were hundreds or thousands instead of units. Wydale found him thus engaged when, heavy-eyed and gloomy, he sought him to inquire whether, and if so, when, he was going across to Karanda.

"Am I going there? Yes I am, Owen," retorted Dareville, savagely. "And I am going to make that scoundrel confess, at the muzzle of this pistol, what part he had in my sister's death, and then shoot him—and afterwards myself. Will you come and help me? Two pistols will be better than one in this affair; and you have some cartridges left, I hope?"

"I have three or four," said Wydale; "but, Sydney, it is not by the rash and murderous act that you suggest that we can best show our respect and sorrow for the dead. We have no evidence to go upon; and to shoot a man without clear proof is murder."

"I don't care," Sydney answered, biting his lips. "I told you I would make him confess; and, if I do that—and I have little doubt I shall—then it is no murder to shoot the cowardly scoundrel."

"What I suggest," said Wydale, "is that we take Dr. Manleth with us and demand to see her. Then

let us hear his opinion as to the cause—of—her—death."

So overcome was he at this point, that he could scarcely conclude the sentence, and he was obliged to turn away.

Sydney remained silent for a space, and then said abruptly :

"Where is George; how is he now?"

"He is with the Princess Idelia, and was sleeping when I left him. He had cried himself to sleep, poor boy, and she is watching him and tending him as tenderly as a mother. It is best for the present to leave him to her care."

"Yes; I think so, too. And I shall be glad if Manleth will go with us. Have you seen Monella? What does he say to it all? What advice does he give? But there,"—here Dareville broke off irritably—"what advice *can* he give? There is nothing to be said—only one thing to be done—and I mean to do it."

"I have not seen him," was Wydale's answer. "I tried to find him, but failed; and, since then, I have been all the time with George."

Later in the day the three started for Karanda, where they were received by the townsfolk with many marks of sympathy and good feeling. Vanina had made herself popular amongst them, and was now proportionately regretted. These people were altogether different from those by whom they were enthralled, *vis.*, the priests and their adherents. But of them not much had recently been seen; and all the other classes, almost without exception, had shown themselves to the strangers as well-disposed

good-natured people. And there were now to be seen many signs of mourning amongst them, as the three passed by on their way to the palace.

Arrived there, they were received by Morveena and others who had been in attendance on Vanina; but of King Kara they saw nothing. They were told that he was prostrated with grief, and had shut himself up and refused to see a soul. At this Sydney glanced at Wydale, but said nothing, only set his teeth together harder.

Vanina was lying upon a raised bier at the upper end of a small hall in the palace. The daylight had been shut out with heavy curtains, and the palace was lighted with hanging lamps and many tapers. She was dressed in a simple white costume, the same that she had worn when George had seen her last, and lying on her side, with her face as though looking down the apartment, seemed to be calmly sleeping. Her eyes, indeed, were not quite closed, but the long drooping lashes so overhung them that this was scarcely noticeable. Dr. Manleth went up to her and took her hand; it was deathly cold and stiff, and, after a brief examination, he turned away.

Not much could be said in the presence of the dead; and Manleth presently led Sydney outside, Wydale staying alone with the marble-like form of the one he had so loved while living.

"So far as I can tell," the doctor said to Sydney, when they were alone, "there is nothing to show the cause of death. Of course a full examination might reveal more than is now apparent. The appearances are, however, quite consistent with death from heart disease. More than that I cannot say."



He was there alone, passing the time in silent communion with the dead.
[p. 327.]

"She *is* dead, doctor?" Dareville asked, in a hot, low tone. "I ask that because I have heard such tales about this Kara, and his devilish arts and sorcerer-like ways, that really one does not know what trick he might play off on us."

But the doctor shook his head. So far as all appearance went, there was no possible ground for doubt.

"I wish Monella had been here," he said presently. "I should have much liked him to see her. But we could not induce him to come. I do believe he thinks it scarcely safe here for any of us."

"And I've little doubt that he is right," Dareville commented gloomily. "However, I have some bullets left for anyone who attempts any tricks with us. Only," he concluded, with a savage glance around, "I want to save them for Kara. I wish I knew where to look for him. I'd get at him somehow or other."

Manleth did his best to soothe and comfort him, and presently persuaded him to return to Dilandis. But when they sought Wydale and pressed him to accompany them, he refused flatly.

"I shall stay here—where my heart is—where my thoughts are," he declared. "Leave me to do as my heart dictates. Do you return and look to George, till I get back to him."

In spite of all their arguments, he insisted on remaining; and in the end they left him, promising to return next day. All that night Wydale remained in the hall in which Vanina lay. He was there alone, passing the time in prayer and silent communion with the dead; and in the morning when he

came out from his vigil, he was hollow-eyed and haggard, and looked, said many, ten years older.

One of the first he encountered was the Princess Morveena. She invited him to have some breakfast with her, but he declined coldly, and asked where King Kara was.

"He has shut himself up away from all of us," she said, "and will see no one. He even refuses food."

"But *where* is he?" Wydale asked again. "I would speak with him."

She shook her head, and declared that she did not even know herself. He had given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed; and it would be as much as their lives were worth to disobey him.

The hours passed, and still neither the doctor nor Sydney came. At last Owen went down to the harbour to make inquiry, and then learned that the gates had been closed against all comers, just as in the time of war between the two communities.

"The Dilandians," he was told, by one he questioned, "are making warlike preparations, and threatening to come here to attack us; *that* we know. Therefore we are compelled to adopt counter measures."

And it appeared, from further inquiries, that Sydney and the doctor had that morning sailed across, and had been refused admission to the harbour; after waiting about for some time in their boat, they had returned to Dilandis.

"And by whose orders were they sent away?" demanded Wydale. "By King Kara's? Because I have been told he has shut himself up and will see no one."

But no one seemed to know exactly as to this; save that some thought the order had come, not from Kara, but from Malion, the high priest. Eventually, Owen retraced his steps to the palace. It was clear to him that he was now a prisoner within the enemy's gates, and though not yet under restraint, probably he soon would be. But the thought in no way troubled him. He felt too unhappy, and too listless, and cared absolutely nothing about what might happen to him.

He passed the day almost in a state of coma. For hours he would be alone in the hall in which Vanina lay; then he would lean on a balcony that overlooked the sea towards Dilandis, and there remain motionless as a statue, sunk in deep reveries, and noticing nothing that went on around him. Many passed and repassed, and some spoke, but none received an answer. And thus, too, he passed the following night.

In the morning he went early to the balcony, hoping he might see Sydney or others of his friends approaching, and that they might make some signs to him. But, disappointed in this, he returned to his solitary vigil before Vanina's shrine—as he now looked upon it; and here presently Morveena joined him.

“And why,” she asked softly, “doth the Lord Owen thus shut his heart and close his ears to all his friends? I can understand that his grief is deep; for I know”—here she sighed deeply—“how much he loved our lost one. Still, it doth not become us to forget courtesy.”

It had been the custom to speak of, and address,

Wydale, in the language of the country, as "the Lord Owen." It was an easier name than Wydale for the islanders to pronounce. In like manner Dareville was styled "Sydney," in preference to his surname.

Wydale listened to this address in the listless manner that had never left him since he had received the news of Vanina's death. He did not even look round, when he replied, in a hopeless tone :

"If I seem to fail in courtesy, princess, thou must pardon me, and put it down to the anguish of my wound. For that I am wounded—aye, even unto death—thou must be well aware. I care not now to hide it;—even though others look upon my wound only to laugh at me," he went on bitterly. "I care not who knows *now* how I loved her. She is gone—so what can it signify? There is no harm in loving the dead! I know that, a little while ago, I durst not have spoken thus to human being, for—she was then promised to your brother. But now—she has gone from this world, and surely I may reverence her memory in peace. Wilt thou not, therefore, leave me?"

Morveena bit her lip, and hesitated for some minutes, during which Wydale fell again into his abstracted mood and took no further notice of her. Then she spoke again :—

"But listen to me, my friend. Thou art in great danger. In fact thou art a prisoner here. Thy friends have declared war against us—at least—" here she hesitated again, then went on—"they are preparing to make war upon us, and already we have felt compelled to adopt defensive measures. There-

fore have they made thee a prisoner of war—only—”

“Only they are ashamed of their own treachery,” Wydale interrupted scornfully, and with more spirit than he had yet shown since his arrival in the place. “A man came here, in time of peace, as a mourner at the bier of a dead friend—and he is to be treacherously made a ‘prisoner of war.’ Oh, most noble princess of a noble country! I congratulate thee upon reigning over such a land!”

“But I do not reign, or govern,” she objected. “And I came, in all good faith, to warn thee—and, if thou wilt, to aid thee. Is it a fitting return to treat me thus? I was about to say that, but for me, thou wouldst already have been seized, dragged from this place, and thrown into prison. I have insisted that thy grief shall be respected; I have insisted that thou shalt be free to indulge thy sorrow unmolested; and for me this has been granted. But consider, my Lord Owen, art thou making me a friendly return for this?”

Owen sighed. “If I have seemed discourteous, princess,” he said wearily, “I ask thy pardon. After all, I care little now what befalls me, or how they deal with me.”

She eyed him in silence for a few moments, then replied:

“Thou shouldst have more courage, more boldness, my Lord Owen, and—more belief in thy true friends. Now, I have seen ever since I did first set eyes on thee, how thou didst give thy whole thoughts to this lady who is dead—while she neglected thee—and how thou didst exclude all others from close friendship. Else mightst thou have seen—”

"Seen what?" asked Owen, noting that she hesitated.

"That there were some—*one* at least—" she went on, almost passionately—"who could have consoled thee for the loss of her thou couldst not lately even hope for."

Owen shook his head, and made answer, slowly :

"I thank thee, princess; I think I understand thy meaning. But it is well I should declare at once that, while I thank thee for thy proffered friendship, I can offer no such friendship in return."

"And yet," persisted she, "I hold a secret for which thou wouldst give all thou hast—aye," she exclaimed with sudden energy, "thy life, aye thy very soul itself, as I believe."

An inquiring look came into his eyes; then he returned calmly :

"Thou mistakest, princess. There is only one gift for which I would barter my life or risk my soul, and, that is beyond thy power to give."

"Be not too sure of that, my friend," she answered, with an air of triumph. "I know thy heart's desire; and I can grant it, if I so choose. It remains to ask, What wilt thou pay for it?"

But he regarded her almost with contempt, and said :

"Again thou mistakest, princess. My only desire is that the Princess Vanina should be alive again and restored to her friends. *That* is beyond thy power."

"But it is *not*," replied Morveena, coming close to him, and looking with her lustrous eyes straight into his. "It is just *that* I can do. What price art thou prepared to pay for its accomplishment?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

MORVEENA AND WYDALE.

OWEN WYDALE gazed in a half-bewildered way back into the face that had come so close to his. There was in its expression a passion of such intensity as he had never looked upon before. Yet it failed to affect him with responsive feelings, for he only turned wearily away.

"Why dost thou mock me with proposals of impossible bargains?" he asked, in a disappointed tone. "*If* thou couldst do what thy words imply—*if* thou couldst bring the Princess Vanina back to life, and restore her to her friends, I would willingly remain here in captivity for the remainder of my days; nay, I would give my life itself—nor deem the price too high.

"I take thee at thy word, my Lord Owen," Morveena boldly answered. "Thou hast said thou wouldst gladly remain here in captivity, but in thy mind thou hast a sorrowful captivity. Say only that thou wilt remain a captive to *me*, and I will grant thee thy desire."

"Again I comprehend thee not, princess," he said. "Thou canst not restore the dead to life; wouldst that thou could, for then I would gladly give—"

"Wilt thou swear to that?"

"Right gladly. By what shall I swear?"

"Oh! I have heard," returned Morveena, "that thou dost believe only in one God; not in many, as do we. Thou shalt swear then by thine own one great God!"

"I do swear it!" Owen solemnly affirmed. "And now show me to what purpose thou hast led me on to this!"

For answer, Morveena stepped up to him and said, almost in a whisper:

"*Vanina is not dead!*"

Wydale uttered an exclamation, but she laid her finger on her lip.

"Hush!" she said, "thou wilt call others hither, and bring down on me my brother's vengeance. Now I will show thee—but, remember, thou belongest now to me; thou art captive to me, as hath been agreed. Thou hast naught further with Vanina than to see her restored to life and to her friends!"

"Now," she continued, "stand thou where thou now art, and see what I shall do; but move not, speak not, and come not near her. If thou dost, I renounce the bargain."

"I promise," he declared, now roused to a high pitch of excitement and expectation.

Morveena mounted the steps, on the top of which was placed the bier upon which Vanina lay. She drew from a pouch or pocket something which she waved to and fro under the nostrils of the recumbent figure. And soon a flush suffused the deathly-white cheeks, the nostrils were distended, the lips parted, and the bosom heaved with laboured gasps; then the eyes opened and gazed at Wydale with an expression that

he had never seen in them before. There seemed to be love, appeal, entreaty, all mingled together. He could not resist that look, and, forgetful of his promise, he rushed towards her and cried aloud, "Vanina! Vanina!"

But Morveena met him with uplifted hand and a flashing eye, and stepped forward to prevent him from approaching her; and thereupon Vanina sank back into her former death-like state.

"Thou hast not kept thy promise, my Lord Owen," Morveena said, almost fiercely. "Since I see I cannot depend on thee, I shall proceed no further with her restoration."

For a moment he almost glared at her. The thought came to him to seize her and force from her the secret that would bring his loved one back to life. But he recognised in time the futility of such madness, and stepped back.

"I was so astonished," he said humbly, "that I temporarily forgot my promise. Proceed; and I will not forget again."

"No!" she answered haughtily. "I will do no more to-day. I have shown thee enough for the time being. Thou knowest now that the Princess Vanina is not dead, but only in a trance from which she can be awaked at will. Thou hast agreed to certain terms; it remains to prove to me that thou wilt fulfil thy part of the bargain, if I do mine. And now," she added, in a softer voice, "now that thy anxiety is relieved—that thou knowest she is not really dead—there is no longer need for this sepulchral lack of gaiety. Thy friend sleepeth there in peace and quiet, and unharmed. Come now with me—thou art my

captive, recollect—and let us see whether we cannot find some amusement to pass the time.”

She led him, unresisting, out of the hall. He walked like one in a dream, feeling that he was beginning a new life—a life in which there would be no Vanina; and yet she would not be dead; she would lead *her* life amid other scenes, while he was leading his away from her. And, be it said, now that his great grief for her was assuaged, that he knew that she was not dead, it seemed but a small thing, after all, to sacrifice his future happiness. He rapidly balanced matters in his mind, and came to a conclusion which might be summed up somewhat thus:

“After all, I never declared my love to her—not since we came here—and she knows not that it still exists. She is to leave here free—if the bargain be kept—to love whom she pleases in the future; and *I* remain as the hostage of her liberty; but of *that* also she will know nothing. Since she has never loved me, she will not miss me; all that I have now to do is to make the best of the situation in which I find myself.”

So he followed Morveena at her call, sat beside her at the banqueting table, and played his part with courtesy, if not with much enthusiasm, during the remainder of the evening. Morveena, her superb figure made the most of by her toilette, and full of triumph and satisfaction at the fulfilment of what she had long ardently desired, was not only gracious, but exerted every art for his bewitchment. So much so that Wydale, having once made up his mind that it was his duty to conciliate her, even found himself yielding to her compelling beauty and enchantment. And,

when they parted for the night, she whispered to him, with sparkling eyes :

“Ah, now do I begin to believe in thy pledge to me ! On my side I will keep mine, fear not ; even in the very teeth of my brother Kara. Thou shalt see what pleasures we can taste together, and what it will be to rule with me this realm. But,” she added abruptly, while a flash of distrust and menace swept across her face, “deceive me—rouse my jealousy—my anger—and then thou wilt find it were better thou hadst never been born !”

They separated soon after for the night, and Owen retired to a chamber that had been assigned to him ; but, try as he would, and, notwithstanding that he had had no sleep for at least two days and nights, he could get no rest when he lay down. He lay and pondered over all that had occurred, and, the more he pondered, the more dissatisfied he became at having seemed to yield to Morveena’s attractions, or blandishments, as he termed them to himself. And there came upon him a great remorse for every word and look that he had given her that night in token of his fidelity. The memory of it now brought to him a feeling of disgust. While in her company, the glamour of her great beauty had affected him beyond what he could have believed possible. Now the reaction had come upon him, and he felt more than sorry ; he felt ashamed of himself. The fact that he had set out to go through it with good intent no longer sufficed to excuse him to himself. And as these thoughts came home to him, there entered into his mind a great longing to kneel again before the inanimate Vanina, to pour out to her deaf ears the story of his hopeless love, and to

try to excuse himself—though she could not hear—for his seeming lapse, that night, from his love for her.

And, in the end, this craving so took possession of him as to become irresistible; and he abandoned further effort to contend with it. He rose, dressed himself, and stole softly through the silent and deserted corridors towards the hall in which Vanina lay.

He noiselessly entered the dimly-lighted hall, which he found empty, save for the death-like form he came to look upon; and, when he had gazed awhile upon the well-known, much-loved features, he sank upon his knees, and, half-unconsciously, poured forth, in murmured, broken words, his whole heart and soul.

“Oh, my dear one!” he almost sobbed, “you who never listened to my words of love ere this, and who cannot hear them now—to you, now, I may surely say what I durst not utter before—what I shall never address to you again. To-night I did seem to forget you, to be entranced by another’s surpassing beauty; but it was not really so, beloved. Here, speaking to you for the last time, and in all earnestness and truth, I do entreat you that you forgive all that seems to be an offence to my great love for you. You will never know the sacrifice I have made to-day for your sweet sake—the sacrifice of the whole of my future life; the hateful bondage to which I have given myself—ah—yes—but—still it is for your dear sake! You will never know! You will go forth—back to the old times—or at least to a new life in which I shall have no part; and perhaps you will think I was easily consoled for my loss of your love. Oh! dear one,

think not that! That would be indeed the hardest of all for me to bear! I know you cannot hear my appeal to you; yet I cannot keep myself from praying to you never to have that belief about me—for—beloved—my heart—all my thoughts, my whole being, belong ever to you; and, as I have never loved any but you throughout my life—so—I solemnly swear, here, before your dear form that hears me not—I shall never have any love to give to another so long as life with me shall last!”

He rose slowly, sorrowfully, to his feet, and turned to retrace his steps to his sleeping chamber, when, to his astonishment, the room was suddenly filled with armed men, some of whom carried torches that lighted up the scene with a bright but flickering glare. In advance of them stood Morveena; but no longer the soft-eyed, languishing Morveena of two or three hours ago. In her place stood one who would have passed well for an incarnation of a Fury, or of womanly jealousy and hatred.

“Seize him!” she cried, with flashing eyes and scowling brows. “Seize the traitor who hath broken his oath to his own so-called God—seize and bind him, and carry him to the Hall of the Living-dead, and there let him meet the death that he deserves!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE CATACOMBS OF THE LIVING-DEAD.

IN the centre or thereabouts of the island of Atlantis, about half-way, that is, from the "caverns" to the city of Karanda, the wall of perpendicular cliff that marked the shore line rose abruptly into a mountain of considerable height. It stood like a great tower at the point of junction with a rocky ridge that ran across the interior of the island, dividing it into two basin-like tracts of country. This ridge was the boundary line between the two communities; this mountain thus looked down upon both domains upon the one side and on the sea upon the other.

It bore several names. One was the "Crystal Mountain," for it was composed wholly of crystal rock. It had been hollowed out and formed in terraces; or perhaps it had been originally hollow, and thus required little work to adapt it for the purpose it was put to. In any case it was now an immense covered amphitheatre, with galleries capable of seating many hundreds of people, yet leaving a spacious arena in the centre. This was the Temple of the Goddess Kraldeema, the chief of the deities worshipped by the Karanites; and it was the abode of the mysterious monsters called "Kralens," otherwise "vampires," which were supposed to be under

Kraldeema's special protection. For this terrible being was the goddess of death and suffering and cruelty; analogous, probably, to Devî or Kâli, the wife of Siva the Destroyer, that many-armed monstrosity worshipped by the Hindoos, known also formerly as the special deity and protectress of the atrocious Thug confederacy.

Another name for the Crystal Mountain was the "Hall" or "Catacombs" of the Living-dead. This referred to one part of it, where an immense hall, carved out of the solid crystal, and shut off from all the rest, was given up to those unhappy ones who were destined to be sacrificed to the Kralens, and were here imprisoned awaiting their fate, all lying in the same state of death-like trance as that into which Vanina had been thrown.¹

This formed a gruesome feature in the worship appertaining to the goddess. Its object it is difficult to determine; but it illustrates what would appear to be almost a general principle in regard to heathenish religions all over the globe—that they are chiefly to be distinguished from each other by some special form of cruelty invented for, and peculiar to, each.

One end of the "catacombs" opened into a garden, in

¹ A method of instantaneously producing this condition by a slight wound is known to the Indian tribes of British Guiana, who practise it on animals in their hunting expeditions by means of arrows dipped in some composition of which they possess the secret. An animal wounded by one of these arrows is instantly paralysed, and falls into a trance-like condition, yet it is not dead, and in this way the carcass can be kept in a hot climate longer than would otherwise be the case. See books of travel of the country by Mr. Barrington Brown and other explorers.—*Author.*

which were fountains and perfumed flowers and shady walks ; and it was part of the "preparation" which intended victims had to undergo that they should be occasionally roused from their torpor and made to exercise for a while—varying from an hour or two to a few days—in this garden. Here, shut in by walls of perpendicular rock that precluded all possibility of escape, they could look out through barred gates over the sea in one direction, and the interior of the island in another. The garden was placed in a high position, and parts of it were always more or less shaded by the overhanging rock ; while cool and refreshing breezes often swept across it, entering through the great barred barriers at each end.

It was in this garden that Wydale found himself when he awoke to consciousness on the morning following the scene with Morveena. For some time he could not recall what had happened ; but by degrees recollection came back to him, though even then he had only a confused idea of what had taken place.

He dimly remembered attempting to fight his way out of the palace. He remembered that he had drawn his revolver, and shot down the first two who had attempted to lay hands on him ; that this had so far frightened the rest that they had retreated and left one entrance to the room free ; but there he had been met by a fresh crowd of soldiers, who, knowing nothing of the danger they ran, had suddenly rushed upon him and borne him to the ground. He had then but two cartridges left. These he had fired, when a stunning blow on the head had blotted out the whole scene, and he knew nothing of what happened afterwards.

He now rose, feeling somewhat dazed, from a couch upon which he had been lying, and looked about him. He was in a sort of cell that opened upon the garden, from which it could be shut off by a thick door of wood and a barred gate. As the door was open, he could see the garden through the gate, which he discovered was unfastened, whereupon he opened it and stepped out into the sunlight, and for the next hour he was employed in exploring the place, and speculating why he had been placed in it instead of in some noisome prison. A prison, however, it was all the same. He soon satisfied himself as to that. Round it, here and there, were narrow chambers like that in which he had found himself. These were all shut off, in similar fashion, by wood or iron doors and barred gates. Sometimes the door was open while the gate was fastened, sometimes both were closed, shutting out all view of what was within. At the farther end of each cell was another door, opening, probably, into a corridor. So far as he could ascertain, all the cells were untenanted. He wandered to the boundaries of the garden, and gazed out through the barriers of open iron work upon the view spread out beyond. But the place was so situated that he could see only what was distant. Whatever was below was hidden from sight. Thus there was no chance of his communicating, as he had at first hoped he might, with some passing Dilandian boat. Nor was it possible to climb up the bars, nor would it have been of any use could he have done so, for on the other side was nothing but perpendicular rock, so smooth that even a fly, one would have thought, could scarcely have walked upon its surface.

At one side, where the rock that shut in the garden rose sheer and overhanging—the opposite side to that on which the cells were placed—was a large opening, shut off in like manner, *viz.*, with a great door, that closed behind a barred iron gate. The door was open, and he looked in through the bars ; but all within was gloom, only dimly illuminated by the light that came in through the gateway, supplemented by that of a few hanging lamps. From these came a peculiar aromatic scent, an odour as of incense.

Knowing nothing of the true meaning of the dim shapes he could but just discern within, Wydale turned from the place with little interest, and made his way to a seat under a shady tree that had been trained to form an extensive arbour. Here he sat down and listened for a while to the plashing of a fountain close at hand, thinking out all that had lately happened, and wondering at the position in which he found himself.

While thus ruminating, he heard a footstep, and, turning round, perceived, approaching him, a grave-looking man, with white hair and beard, dressed in a long, flowing purple robe, gathered in at the waist with a girdle. The stranger waved his hand as in salute, and thus addressed him :

“ I am called Zanolda, and am Astrologer to King Kara. May I speak with thee, my son ? ”

Wydale received him doubtfully. The stranger's speech was fair enough, but Owen did not altogether like his face. It was smiling, but the smile was, to his thinking, too suave, too smooth. And there were

lines about the features that betokened a disposition hard and stern at least, if not actually cruel.

"I knew thy countryman who stayed amongst us, and who hath now gone over to thy friends. Indeed, I may say that I befriended him."

Wydale suddenly called to mind Peter Jennings, and how he had related that Zanolde had saved him from imprisonment.

"I have heard of it," he therefore now replied, in a more friendly tone. "But why do you seek me? Do you bring me good news?"

Zanolde shook his head.

"I fear me not, my son; yet perhaps I have that to tell thee that thou fain wouldst know."

"Say on."

Zanolde seemed to hesitate, but presently proceeded:

"There is one in whom thou takest a great interest; indeed, as I know by my study of the stars, her fate and thine are closely interwoven."

"What of her?" demanded Wydale, with outward calmness, but with an inward eagerness he found it hard to repress.

"The decree hath gone forth that thou art to die together."

"Ah! *Whose* decree?"

"It is the decree of King Kara and of Malion, the High Priest."

Wydale remained silent for a space, and then rejoined:

"Well, I did not expect much else in such a country, so I am not surprised. We are in your power, and you can do with us as you will."

"It does not rest with me," was the reply. "I came but to warn thee; also to tell thee that perhaps a way of escape may even yet be found for thee."

"What way—the same that has been already offered?" Wydale asked, with such contempt that the other looked up in some dismay.

"Hush, my son!" he said, with a deprecating wave of the hand. "Pile not the fuel on fierce fires. Think of the maiden—of thy duty towards her."

It was a painful subject to discuss, and Wydale felt he would rather not pursue it. He trusted no one in that place; he felt convinced that he was surrounded on all sides by treachery, jealousy, and ruthless passion. What availed discussing anything with people whom one could not trust?

"Let us," he said coldly, "if you please, talk of something else—if there is aught else to talk about. If not, I pray you leave me in peace."

"Come with me," Zanolda said; "I have much to show thee. Perhaps, after thou hast seen, thou wilt be of a different mind."

He took from his girdle a bunch of keys, and, motioning to Owen to follow him, went towards the barred gate in the rock and opened it.

"In there," he said, "are the 'Catacombs of the Living-dead.' Here victims rest before they are given to the sacrifice. It gives them time for prayer and meditation—time to make their peace with the gods they have offended."

They entered a vast, vaulted hall, in which was a central walk partitioned off on both sides with bars, seemingly of gold, that were placed at intervals throughout its length. Behind these bars were vaults,

open in front, and in each was a kind of altar, with tapers burning on each side ; and in the centre was a raised slab, six feet or thereabouts in length. Many of these vaults were elaborately carved and decorated, and ornamented with gold and precious stones, that sparkled and flashed in the light of the lamps and candles ; and some of the slabs looked like golden biers fitted for the lying-in-state of a dead king or queen or warrior chief.

And upon these biers were recumbent forms, lying and looking much as had Vanina. Under their heads and feet were jewelled cushions of purple and gold, while lighted tapers placed around them threw a dim, ruddy light upon the figures that lay cold and motionless as though dead.

"Thou seest!" said Zanolda. "These are all destined for the sacrifice. They are not dead, nor do they sleep in calm unconsciousness. They have no need for food or drink. All functions of the body are suspended, save that of the brain. They can *think* and *hear*, and that is all."

Wydale felt almost sick while he looked upon these hapless ones. There were both young and old, fair young forms and bearded men : all seemed to be calmly sleeping—but what, thought Wydale, must be their thoughts, if it were as Zanolda said ?

Suddenly he started, and could not repress a cry. For there, extended upon one of the biers, was one he recognised. It was Joseph Durford, the rascally skipper of the *Saucy Fan*. Then he perceived close beside him, the mate, Steve Foster.

He stood and gazed upon these two with mingled feelings. Pity he could scarcely feel ; yet their

punishment was one at which his mind revolted. Still, but for these villains, he thought bitterly, neither he nor Vanina would now be in their present hapless situation. They might now have been happy in a mutual love; certainly they would never have been launched into these adventures that were ending so disastrously.

Zanolda observed the direction of his glance, and nodded in appreciation.

"Yes, yes, I see thou recognisest them. The others of their party have been given to the Kralens; but these two have lain here thus for many months—since, indeed, soon after they arrived here. I do not know what was thy quarrel with them, but I am aware thou lovest them not."

Owen shuddered.

"Truly I have no cause to love them," he replied. "Yet it is too great a punishment—to lie there day after day, week after week, and month after month, only to brood without cessation upon a wicked past and a hopeless future."

"There is worse in store for them," Zanolda responded, with grim emphasis. "More's the pity that thou shouldst court a like fate, when the road by which thou canst avoid it lies before thee. But now I am about to show thee our temple sacred to the goddess Kraldeema, the home of her dread ministers the Kralens!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VANINA AND WYDALE.

PASSING through a low gallery closed at both ends with heavy and close-fitting wooden doors studded with bolts and spikes of iron, the two came out into the great amphitheatre that formed nearly the whole interior of the hollow mountain. At one end was a raised platform like a roomy stage, upon which was a throne of gold and silver, ornamented with jewels of great size and lustre. On each side of it were richly cushioned and ornamented chairs, evidently special seats for the priests and high officials. At the back was a cleverly-executed fresco in rich colouring of some great creature like a dragon.

All around, except at one end, were terraced galleries carved out of the solid crystal, rising tier upon tier almost to the roof. Some of these were of irregular width, running back, as it seemed, into side chambers, so that there were many dark recesses into which the light of the hanging lamps failed to penetrate. Flights of steps, cut out of the crystal rock, served for communication between these various galleries.

But the most noticeable feature of this uncommon "Temple" was a kind of cage which occupied the whole of the space not taken up by the galleries, thus

enclosing a central arena of immense extent. The bars composing this cage were apparently of solid gold. They were strong and massive, and ran from the roof, sixty or eighty feet above, down to the floor of the arena, where they were fixed firmly in the rocky floor. At intervals horizontal bars ran round, knitting the whole together, these being from eight to nine feet, one above the other. The upright bars were about eighteen inches or two feet apart, leaving sufficient room for a person to pass freely through them into or out of the cage.

The cage followed the shape of the amphitheatre—that of a horseshoe—and was elongated at one end where there were no galleries, being carried right up to a perpendicular wall of rock. At this end of the floor was a ring of iron fencing, some forty feet in diameter, which appeared to be a guard-fence round a great well or pit. This pit was covered with a horizontal barred gate which shut down over it in trap-door fashion. From this pit came a sound as of rushing or falling water. Immediately above the pit was a large oblong opening in the rock, now closed with a massive door of wood and metal. At times one was sensible of a sickly, foetid smell, but usually the prevailing odour was of incense diffused by the lamps and by numerous small braziers which flared around the lower galleries. These illuminated the place, so far as their light extended, with a weird, flickering glow that was reflected from thousands of minute points in the crystals above and below, and caused, in other places, fantastic, formless shadows that leaped and appeared and disappeared as the lambent flames danced up and down.

"This," said Zanollda, indicating the great space that was barred off, "is called 'The Golden Death-cage.' These great bars that reach from the floor to the roof high above us are all of solid gold. Yonder pit is the den of the Kralens. What is down there I know not; no man knows or hath ever known. We can tell, by the sound, that there must be below an underground torrent; but whence it comes and whither it goes we know not. Nor do we know what else may be below. Some say that there are great caverns there, extending far underground, and even under the sea. Certainly the subterranean river must communicate with the sea; and doubtless it carries thither the bones and other remains of the victims that the Kralens take down there."

"Take down there?"

"Why, yes; they seize upon their prey here in the cage, and carry it down to their dens below. The river must therefore carry off the bones, else would the place have become choked up long ago."

"You said just now," said Owen, thoughtfully, "that the sailors who deserted us had been given to these monsters. I thought that all such doings had ceased. It was so promised when the peace was made."

Zanollda shrugged his shoulders.

"It was so promised by King Kara," he replied, "but not by Malion, the high priest; and he governs here in all such matters. These ceremonies have gone on much the same, though the fact was kept secret from all but a comparative few."

"Then faith has not been kept with us! Another drop in the cup that Kara is filling for himself."

"A drop or two more or less can't make much difference to *him*," Zanolda rejoined, indifferently. "The cup was already nearly full," he added, dreamily, as though to himself. "So it is written among the stars. And it has been a gigantic cup, and has taken long in filling." Then, with an abrupt change of manner, he went on: "These braziers are fed with a certain herb that overpowers the effluvium given off by the Kralens, else could we not endure the place."

At that moment there issued from the pit a horrible, blood-curdling sound, half-scream, half-roar. Though Wydale had heard the cry before, yet he was wholly unprepared for the added force and power lent to it by the surroundings. The pit formed a gigantic speaking trumpet that magnified the shriek a hundred times. It was echoed again and again, reverberating from one rocky angle to another of the great domed roof, dying away, eventually, in low, sullen, muttering growls.

Despite himself, Wydale started violently and shuddered; and, perhaps, had there been light enough, it would have been found that he had turned pale.

Zanolda regarded him with a peculiar smile.

"Ah," he observed, "thou dost not like the sound of their cry? Few do."

"I have heard it before; but never like that," said Wydale.

"Let it teach thee the wisdom of avoiding them, my son."

Wydale was silent; a cold chill came over him, and he was seized with a great horror and disgust.

"Let us go," he murmured hoarsely.

"But first let me explain—"

"Pray let us go from here ; I feel sick and giddy."

Thereupon Zanolda led the way, and, without further talk, the two returned through the rows of "the Living-dead," into the sweet, fresh, perfumed atmosphere of the garden.

"What a contrast !" exclaimed Owen, inhaling a deep breath. His relief was great.

Zanolda eyed him with his enigmatical smile.

"Ponder it well, my son—what thou hast seen and heard—and think whether it would not be worth thy while to purchase immunity from this fate, and gain, at the same time, the smiles of an enchanting woman."

"Again that ?" said Wydale wearily. "I thought the princess was incensed against me."

"She *was* ; but she already repents her of her hasty action, and is ready to forgive thee—if thou wilt but ask her."

Wydale made a gesture of impatience, and Zanolda, seeing little hope of moving him, turned away.

"Think it over ; I will see thee again to-morrow," said he at parting.

The next day he came again, and the next, and for several succeeding days. But Wydale remained of the same mind ; and at last Zanolda grew tired and angry.

"I give it up ; thou must meet thy fate," he said. "I shall come no more !"

For two days Wydale was left practically alone. Three or four times each day someone came into his cell bringing food and drink, without a word. But the prisoner scarcely tasted it.

On the third day since he had last seen Zanolda, he was taking his usual listless stroll about the garden, when, in passing one of the cells, he became aware that someone was within. The door was thrown back, and, on his trying the barred gate, it yielded. He pushed it open, and stood staring before him in amazement.

“Vanina!”

The figure he had been gazing at turned round, and he saw that it was indeed Vanina. She came towards him gravely, but without hesitation, frankly holding out her hand.

“Yes, it is I, dear friend,” she said, with a look that was both sad and sweet. “It has been permitted me to come to see you that we might have a talk together.” She sighed, then added, “Our last talk, probably, in this world.”

And while Owen continued gazing at her, too surprised and bewildered to reply, she proceeded.

“Let us go out of this place, it is stifling. Ah!” she drew a long breath as she stepped into the garden, “this is a change indeed! I never thought to breathe the free air and look upon a scene like this again!”

Wydale, like one in a dream, led her to the seat beneath the spreading tree that had become his favourite resting-place; then, when she was seated, stood before her, gazing down upon her, still dumb, embarrassed and confused. He could not yet get over his bewilderment.

“Dear friend,” Vanina recommenced, “our time is short, and there is much to be said. Seat yourself beside me, and let me tell you why I am here.”

He did as she requested, still not knowing what to say.

"I have been sent here," she continued, with a sigh, "as a sort of ambassadress—on a mission to persuade you against myself—"

"Stop!" Wydale interrupted, almost fiercely. "Do you mean that you have been sent here with another message from that she—?"

"Hush," she urged softly. "Hear what I have to say—"

"I believe I know," he cried out, hoarsely; "and is this further insult to come from *you*? Have I not suffered enough through you? But—" He suddenly broke off, and went on in an altered tone, "perhaps it is your wish."

She put her hand appealingly on his arm.

"Listen to what I have to tell you first, and you will better understand."

She paused for a moment, then went on slowly, almost painfully:

"In any case we have terrible trials before us, and this is no time for false pride or misplaced sentiment. Unless—certain proposals be agreed to—we are both to die—by a dreadful death—on the fifth day from now."

"I know," Wydale assented, in a low voice. "Zanolda told me so."

"Then, dear friend, let us speak plainly to each other; let there be no misplaced reserve between us at a time like this. Let me set the example in being frank. My friend, I have been lying now for many days and nights powerless to move, yet unable to sleep away the time. My brain has been busy all the

while, and I have seen the past with different eyes. I freely confess my own mad folly, and frankly own I thoroughly detest myself for my treatment of some of my friends, and, above all, of you."

Wydale made an impatient movement, but she went on :

"Do not interrupt me ; let me go on while I have the courage, else may I break down. Now, let me tell you that in that state of trance in which I have been lying you can *hear* all that goes on around you, and, through half-closed eyes, *see* all that passes in front of them."

At this Wydale started ; and a great thrill ran through his veins when he realised what all this meant.

"Then," he exclaimed, "you heard—"

"Everything, my friend. I heard and understood the noble self-sacrifice you attempted for my sake—even while your heart was breaking in the attempt. I know, too, why it failed." She blushed slightly, then, looking down, she added : "And I thank you from the bottom of my heart—with all my soul—I thank you for what you then essayed in the hope of benefiting me, and for your good opinion. I did not know," she concluded, with a sigh, "there was such a man in the world ; and it makes me feel the more acutely how unworthily I have acted."

Wydale caught her hand and tried to hold it in his own, but she withdrew it with gentle firmness.

"Vanina !" he exclaimed, "do not talk to me like this. You are breaking my heart !"

"I have done that already, I fear," was her reply ; "and I have lost your life as well. But for me, you would not be in the net in which you are enmeshed."

"Do not speak of that, Vanina. Life for me is worthless without you. If you think I have done aught to deserve your good opinion, tell me that you would have loved me if you could have got away from here."

She raised her eyes to him. She was calm and sad, and there was no affected shyness when she answered :

"As I said before, this is no time to conceal one's sentiments. I do not deserve your good opinion of me ; still you shall have the truth. Owen, dear, true friend, I have loved you all along."

He sprang up and tried to take her in his arms, but she repulsed him in the same calm fashion, and bade him seat himself again beside her.

"Yes," she murmured dreamily, "at a time like this I may confess the truth, and you must *know* I would not now, with death staring me in the face, say to you what is false. But you will wonder why, if that was so, I behaved in the way I did. Truly," gravely shaking her head, "I know not myself. Let me say this, however. I began a half-flirtation with Prince Rokta more to tease you than for anything else. I was never serious in it, *never* ! But when I found you seemed inclined to give me up to him so easily—"

"Vanina ! How can you—"

"Hush ! Let me go on. I had expected you to be bolder—more masterful—with me, and I was piqued at your seeming content to let me drift so easily apart from you. Well, that is all as to *that*."

"It was wrong—and cruel—cruel to me—and to that gentle girl Idelia."

"I know, I know, and heaven knows I have been sorry for it since ; but *indeed* I never meant harm to any, and only afterwards saw my folly. Now, as to Kara"—here she shivered—"I know not what to say. Truly I do not like him, never have liked him ; indeed, I detested him—I was afraid of him. But I seem to have been in a dream, and I awoke suddenly as from a nightmare that oppressed all my senses. I awoke, or seemed to—let me see—ah ! I remember—it was the day George returned."

Wydale nodded. "I understand," he said, "and I believe you."

"That day, after George had left, Kara came in to see me, and he was more familiar than his wont, for he tried to take my hand—a thing he had never done before. Then I seemed to awake to the hatefulness of the union into which I had so nearly entered. I told him that it must be broken off, and that I should return forthwith to Dilandis ; that I did not like him well enough to marry him, and never could. Then he flew into an awful passion—stormed and raved, and showed himself in his true colours. And the more he did this, of course, the more hateful he became to me, till suddenly he seemed to lose all self-control. He drew something from his pouch that glittered like a small stiletto, and I screamed out, believing he was about to murder me. But he caught me by the hand, and when I thought he was about to stab me to the heart, instead, he only slightly scratched the skin of my head amongst the hair. Immediately I felt sick and dizzy, and I know that I fell to the ground just when Morveena and others entered the room. Then they laid me where you saw

me, and I have been there ever since till last evening, when Morveena brought me back to life, saying she wished to have some talk with me."

"And Kara? What of him? Where is he?"

"I know not. I have neither heard nor seen anything of him since the day on which we had our quarrel."

"I see," said Wydale, "that you still wear his locket."

Vanina put her hand up to her neck.

"This?" she exclaimed. "I had forgotten it. I will throw it into the sea yonder."

But Wydale stayed her hand. "Keep it, and wear it still for a while," he urged. "It has been the cause of your awakening from the spell that Kara had cast upon you; so we have been told, and I am bound, in the face of what has happened, to believe it."

And then he told her briefly of George's adventures amongst the Flower-Dwellers, and of his having exchanged the mysterious discs.

Presently they returned to the subject of Morveena.

"Well—you know now—what it is she has sent me here for," she said. "What answer am I to give her?"

"What answer you think well, Vanina. If it is your wish to save your life—I could perhaps even—"

"But it *isn't*," she answered, firmly; "I could never live out a life so purchased. Nor is it certain that she would—even, perhaps, *could*—keep her promise. The very air here is full of treachery and deceit and wickedness. No, Owen, I could not condemn you to such a life, even to free me; even if I could trust to

her promise—I would rather die now and end it all—unless *you* wish otherwise.”

“It is my decision also,” Wydale answered, solemnly. “But I cannot understand what Sydney and the others are doing all this time, that they seem to make no move on our behalf.”

“They think me dead, for one thing.”

“True; I had forgotten that. Oh, if we could only communicate with them! Five days, did you say? Oh, what could not Monella do in four days, if he but knew our situation, and that you are still alive.”

“I fear he could not do much to aid us here,” Vanina answered, sadly. “And there is no time—five days!”

“I don’t know; Monella is so full of resource. Three or four days to him would be as good as three or four weeks or months with some. But,” he added, gloomily, “I suppose it is of no use to speak of it. There is no possible way to let him know.”

Presently they parted—a terrible yet tender leave-taking it was; and Wydale, believing that he would never see her again, abandoned himself, after she had gone, to grief; but now it was tempered by a sweet solace he had not known before.

But the next day she came again. She looked pale and worn, as though she had had no sleep and had been weeping all the night.

“She bade me come again, and make one last effort to induce you to accede to what she wishes,” she said, sorrowfully. “And they have been doing and saying all sorts of things to frighten me and cause me to persuade you. What say you? Are you still of the same mind?”

Now, at that very moment, while they walked around the garden, there was heard the rushing sound of flapping wings, and lo! with two or three sharp circles, each smaller than the other, the crane that Wydale had made friends with, alighted on the path in front of him, and stood gravely regarding him, as though to say, "Where have you been to lately, and why do you never go out in the boat, so that I can come fishing with you?"

"Why," cried Owen, "it is 'Dick'! Dick the crane, you know. Our bird friend—George's and mine!"

Vanina glanced at the great bird almost affectionately.

"Perhaps it has seen George to-day, and our other friends," she said, with a sigh, "and come straight here from them. And it can return as freely. Oh! if we could but do the same!"

"That gives me an idea," said Owen, in excitement. "If it can't take us back, it can take a message. If I tie a note round its neck, George will be sure to see it. I will write one; Heaven send the bird may not fly away before I can write it," he added, anxiously.

"Oh, Dick—dear Dick—good, nice Dick—come and stay with me! Do not go yet," Vanina pleaded, addressing the bird. Then a thought struck her; she loosened a girdle she wore round her waist and handed it to Owen.

"Quick," she whispered. "Tie him for a few minutes with that. Be quick; if he opens his wings, we may lose our chance."

"Good!" Wydale commented, and, cautiously approaching the bird, he soon had him fettered by the leg, and securely fastened to the seat under the

spreading tree. Then they both set to work to write short notes ; for Wydale always had pencil and paper with him, and, like all fishermen, was never without a bit of string in one or other of his pockets.

He addressed his note to Sydney, and it ran thus :

" Vanina is not dead ; I have seen and spoken to her, and she is beside me now while I write this, and she also will send a note. But we are prisoners, and are doomed to die in the Temple of the Kralens on the occasion of some great festival four days from this. Inform Monella at once. If anyone on earth can help us, it is he. If not, this may be our last message. God bless you all ! Take care of George for the sake of

*" Your unfortunate friend,
" OWEN."*

Vanina's notes, for she sent two—one to George and one to Sydney—were very differently worded ; they were tear-stained and full of love and tenderness and regret for the trouble and anxiety she had caused. Nor did she forget to put in words concerning Wydale, telling how that his present plight was all through his devotion to her. She ended with a very sad farewell, in case they should never meet again.

Then the notes were made into a little parcel and well wrapped up in other paper, and finally tied round Dick's neck in such a manner as to be conspicuous, after which he was released.

When he found himself free, the bird shook out his ruffled feathers, spread his wings, and soared up and away without more ado.

“ He never said ‘good-bye,’ ” said Wydale. “ He is indignant at our chaining him up. I fear he won’t come again. Heaven send, however, that he may be a faithful postman ! ”

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN "THE GOLDEN DEATH-CAGE."

THERE was a great gathering in the "Temple of Kraldeema" on the morning of the fourth day after the visit of the crane to Wydale in the garden. As he had feared, the bird came no more, and he had remained in doubt as to whether his message had reached its destination.

For some reason, he had been left unmolested in the garden; he had not been forced into a state of trance and placed amongst the "Living-dead," in accordance with the rule with those destined for the sacrifice. Perhaps Morveena had feared she might defeat her end, and thought it best to leave him free. Every morning his jailer asked him whether he had "any message for Zanolda," and, on his replying in the negative, left him without another word. Nor had he seen Vanina; and he assumed that they would meet no more. He now therefore passed his time in silent prayer and contemplation, and in preparing his mind for the terrible ordeal that lay before him.

In the Temple of the Crystal Mountain preparations were in progress for the coming sacrifices. It was the chief festival of the year in honour of the goddess Kraldeema, and none of her devout worshippers absented himself on such an occasion,

unless unavoidably compelled. Kara was there in his robes of State, seated on the magnificent throne, and beside him, on one side, sat Morveena, and on the other, Malion, the high priest. Then there were Fralda, his assistant, and Zanolda; a long string of senior and junior priests; Kallenda, the commander-in-chief of the forces, and a number of his officers, with a large sprinkling of those amongst the townspeople who wished to display their zeal for their religion, or to curry favour at the Court; and all the flower of the priestly army. Of the townspeople generally, of the workers amongst the community, there were none. They had their duties to attend to; most of them, indeed, had now been impressed into service against the Dilandians in the new state of war that had arisen, and they were required to guard the harbour and its defences from any sudden attack that might be made whilst all their chiefs and rulers were absent at the festival.

Within the temple many mystic ceremonies had to be performed before the most important function—the devoting of the wretched victims to the Kralens—would take place. There were songs to be chanted, incense to be burned, processions to be formed that marched round singing, went through certain forms, dissolved, then reformed with further marching to and fro, and so on. And every now and then the voices of the chanters would be drowned in a thunderous, roaring scream that filled the whole place with its vibrations, and caused many to start and look around in nervous apprehension.

The "Catacombs of the Living-dead" were empty,

for all there had been recalled to life, and, with a refinement of barbarity, had been turned out into the garden to taste again some of the sweets of life—the fresh air, the golden sunlight, and the perfumed flowers—before returning to that sombre, dim-lighted scene that was to be the witness of their dying moments.

Here, amongst the plants and scented blossoms, these doomed ones walked or sat about in a hushed silence, dazed with the unaccustomed sunlight, and filled with horror at the contemplation of their coming fate. There were exceptions, however, to these silent ones, and amongst them was Steve Foster, who passed the time in swearing and blaspheming audibly. Nor was Durford in much better mood; but he was less demonstrative, and it was only at intervals that he replied to Foster's ravings by an oath or a sudden denunciation of their gaolers.

Neither Vanina nor Wydale was amongst this crowd. The latter had been removed the night before and confined elsewhere; and in the morning he had been brought into the Temple by another way, and now sat on a seat apart, closely guarded by men with drawn swords, watching, apathetically, all that went on before him. He noted, dully, that many amongst the actors in the ceremonies at times seemed to turn sick and faint; they would reel and stagger, and almost fall; and every now and then he found himself in like manner affected. This was the effect of the foul vapours which rose from the Kralens' pit, and which at times proved stronger than the incense burned to neutralise their deadly power. He looked moodily up at the great window now closed

and barred, that was placed at the end of the "cage" over the pit. And he now discovered that the Kralens sent out to desolate the country of the Dilandians, were prevented, by the high ridge that ran across the island, from devastating the territory of Karanda. The Crystal Mountain, being at the angle at which the ridge and the wall of sea-cliff met, looked down with its respective sides into both domains. Hence, when this window was thrown open and the barred trap-door raised, the monsters were free to sally forth, and prowl up and down the country of their enemies, while effectually shut off from their own.

Presently the time arrived for the Kralens to be let loose upon the earliest victims; and these were now brought in. They proved to be Durford and Steve Foster; and Owen could not repress a start of surprise on seeing them. Nor did they hide their astonishment when they noticed him. Since he was unbound, and appeared to be seated calmly at his ease, there was nothing to indicate that he also was to be one of that day's victims. The guards with drawn swords beside him might have been a guard of honour for all the two knew, and no one took the trouble to enlighten them. This crumb of comfort at least Owen had, that these men could not gloat over him, or rejoice that he was in like case to themselves.

They were bound and carried through the bars into the cage, and were laid down on the rocky floor; when those who had carried them in retired hastily outside the cage.

Wydale now understood why the bars of the cage were placed so far apart. It was that the attendants

and assistants at these ghastly executions might be able to pass in and out without the opening or shutting of gates or doors, which, in certain circumstances, might be attended with danger to the spectators. For the Kralens were powerful creatures that might force open an insecurely-fastened gate, whereas the bars, as they stood, were everywhere too close together for anything so large as these flying monsters to pass through.

Of the two wretched men now lying in the cage, Durford alone seemed to retain his self-control. Foster had given way to abject terror, and had made frantic appeals for mercy to those about him. Now he lay motionless, with staring eyeballs, waiting for the end ; which quickly came.

For some little time the roarings that issued from the pit had been increasing both in frequency and volume ; and every now and then there was a mighty blow against the under part of the barred trap-door that shut the monsters in. Evidently they were hungry, and they seemed to know that prey was ready for them ; hence their impatience. Then by some mechanism not apparent to the eye, the great trap was raised, and the way made clear for them to mount and seize their meal.

Upon what followed, Wydale gazed in fascinated horror, powerless to turn his eyes from the awful scene.

There was a loud rushing sound, the whirr of giant wings in constant and violent vibrations, like those of a gigantic bee hovering above a flower. Then there rose slowly from the pit a shape of such surpassing hideousness that it brought once more to Wydale's

mind the old legend of the Gorgons who turned people to stone by their looks alone.

A scaly body, and legs armed with cruel-looking talons of startling length and thickness, were surmounted by a head scarcely to be described in words. There was a huge mouth, whose upper jaw curved over like the beak of a bird of prey, with large dilated nostrils, and a flat low forehead, if the term may be used in regard to such a creature. There were details in its general outline that were partly fish-like, partly human, and the mingling of the two was inexpressively repulsive and disgusting. But the most frightful features of the monster were its eyes. These were large, fixed, and fish-like. They seemed to see, and yet not to see, and withal there was in their expression the most ghastly, horrible, mocking *leer* that ever mortal eye could gaze on. To say that the creature's ugliness surpassed anything ever seen is to describe it mildly. There was something in this frightful *leer* that was aggressive, exasperating, unbearable; a suggestion of triumphant malice, of satanic cunning, of smug satisfaction at its own outrageous hideousness, that seemed almost supernatural. The senses revolted at the spectacle; uprose in fury and repulsion; one longed to rush upon the creature, and with one's heel stamp out ruthlessly the life from a monstrosity so appalling.

This awful creature made its way forth from the pit, and slowly approached the two pinioned forms. There was in its movements—save for the ceaseless vibration of the wings—no trace of haste. It moved upon its prey with horrible deliberation, seeming to gloat over it with a sensuous complacency. But

finally—almost to the relief of Wydale—it fastened upon the two, raised them in the air, and disappeared with them within the pit. The great trap-door closed on them with a clash, and at the same moment a woman's shriek rang out and echoed again and again from the sides of the rocky roof. Then Wydale turned and saw, not far from him, Vanina, who was swaying from side to side, as though about to fall. Instinctively he half rose to go to her assistance, but a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice whispered in his ear :

“Thou hast courted this, and must go through with it; unless—”

It was Zanolda speaking.

Wydale made a gesture of disgust, and was about to reply impulsively, when he caught a glance from Kara, whose glittering eyes were fixed upon him with a look of devilish triumph. This had the effect upon his excited nerves of a sudden cold water douche; and at once he gathered together his somewhat scattered senses.

He returned King Kara's look disdainfully, and turned to Zanolda:

“Since it is to be, I have nothing to add to what I have already said,” he told him, curtly.

Vanina, too, recovered herself, and now gazed composedly around, with much of her old imperious spirit. Kara regarded her a while in silence, and his brow darkened. Then he made a sign to Malion, the high priest, who thereupon stood up, and raised his hand as a sign for silence in the assembly.

He was an old man, with keen, dark eyes, in which ever lurked an evil look. His face was hard, and the

lines of cruelty were to be traced upon every part of his furrowed visage. At first sight of him, Wydale had felt only detestation ; nor were his feelings towards Zanolda much more friendly ; for he felt repelled by his oily, unctuous, yet cynical speech and manner.

Malion now rose, and addressing Kara, said in a loud, clear voice :

"We understand, O King, that thou hast complaint to make against these two."

And he indicated Wydale and Vanina.

Then Kara rose, and, looking at Vanina with vindictive glance, returned :

"I do accuse them both : this woman, that she hath broken a solemn contract to become my wife ; and this man, that he hath aided and abetted her therein."

There was silence throughout the place when these words were spoken. Then Malion addressed Vanina :

"Say, O woman, alien to our race ! Thou hast heard what our great king hath stated. He declares that thou hast fooled him, first by pretending to engage thyself to join with him in marriage, and then by withdrawing and refusing to carry out thy contract. Say, is this so ?"

"I scorn to deny it !" replied Vanina, resolutely. "I despise and hate him, and will die here to-day sooner than become his wife !"

"Enough ! Thou shalt have thy wish," cried Malion. "We need no further evidence of thy traitorous thoughts and actions. And now as to thee"—addressing Wydale—"hast thou aught to say ?"

Wydale shook his head, and looked down to avoid the burning gaze that Morveena had fixed on him. But he said nothing.

"One moment, my Lord Malion," burst out Morveena. "I fain would essay my humble influence on this transgressor. Perchance I may persuade him from the error of his ways. Let the woman meet her just doom; but let this man have space yet for repentance. Haply if I reason with him—"

"I refuse thy proffered offices, princess," Wydale answered firmly, almost rudely. "I decline to discuss this matter further with thee. Let it come to an end at once."

At this speech both Kara and his sister started up in ungovernable fury. Her face was almost purple with rage, and her eyes flashed with an evil glare like a wounded tigress at bay.

"Be it so!" she exclaimed. "Then let him die, here, now, and the sooner the better. I would fain have given him yet one more chance. Let these *two*"—with scathing denunciatory gesture—"die together. I will stay here and witness their death agonies; so only can my just anger be appeased."

But Kara made one last effort to persuade Vanina.

"Consider, maiden," he began. "I could, an' I would, take thee by force. But it is written in the stars that—"

She held up her hand, and turned on him a look of such withering contempt that his eyes dropped before it.

"Peace!" she burst out scornfully. "I am willing to die, King Kara, but not to listen to thy insults."

Kara essayed to reply; then, as though the attempt

to answer almost choked him, he made a sign to Malion, which the latter quickly understood.

"Let the two prisoners be bound and placed in the cage," he said.

And the order was forthwith obeyed. The zealous attendants seized on them, and, with scant ceremony, bound them fast, and carried them through the bars into the cage, laying them side by side, almost on the same places that Durford and Foster had occupied but a little while before. Then they retired and left them.

"Farewell till we meet in the next world, beloved," said Owen softly to her.

"Farewell till then, dear friend," Vanina murmured, "and may Heaven forgive my sin in bringing you to this. For myself I can endure it; I have deserved it. But you—you die here to-day through my mad, wicked folly."

"Nay, dear heart, say not so. I do solemnly declare to you—"

He broke off suddenly, his attention attracted by a movement in the half-lighted galleries above them.

The trap-door had not yet been raised. Those who controlled the machinery only waited Kara's signal, but this the king, for some reason, delayed to give. It may have been that he hesitated at the last moment to devote so fair a being to so terrible a death, or it may have been that he purposely delayed the signal in order to prolong their agony. It was in this short interval that Wydale, turning his eyes wearily away from what he could see of the mouth of the pit, happened to look towards one of the deserted galleries above, and there he saw—just for an instant

—George's face. But no sooner had he caught sight of it, and interchanged a look of intelligence, than it disappeared. But in its place remained two small hands, which were contorting themselves into many curious shapes.

Wydale quickly recognised that signals were being made to him in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, which he and George had often practised together after the death of the latter's little deaf-and-dumb brother. And this is the message that the boy's hands—all that could be seen in the shadows above—spelt out :

"Take courage. Help is at hand. Do not give way. Tell sister."

"Vanina! Do you hear me?" Owen whispered.

"Yes, dear friend. What is it?"

"I have seen George up above there in the gloom, and he has signed to me that help is at hand, and that we are to keep up our courage."

But she only sighed softly, thinking that already his senses were leaving him, and that he raved. For how could George be there, and what help could possibly be at hand at such a pass? Even now the trap-door was lifting, and there rose slowly in the air that frightful shape with its maddening leer and its blood-curdling scream.

But while it still hovered over the pit's mouth, a tall form came suddenly into view and passed between the bars into the cage. Both Wydale and Vanina caught a view of it as it stood over them for a moment, and then turned to confront the monster. It was Monella; and instantly a great hope leaped into their breasts. Was it possible that help had really come?

But this hope weakened when they saw that Monella was alone. He was not the leader of a conquering host that had suddenly stormed the city and swarmed up to the entrance of the Temple of Kraldeema. He was alone; and what could one man do against so many—and with the Kralen against him, too?

Monella towered above them, and a black mask he wore upon his face hid alike his purpose and his features. He was clad in a complete coat of mail; on his left arm he bore an immense shield; in his right hand he wielded a mighty war-axe, and in his belt there was another. Evidently, in remembrance of his former encounter with the Kralen, he had resolved to abandon the sword in favour of the axe; and, in view of possibilities, he had armed himself with two.

"Take courage," he whispered to them, quietly. "If God and my right arm fail me not, we shall yet save you."

But it seemed a hopeless task. Should he prevail against the Kralen, he would have all these armed men to face alone. And should he not prevail—well, then, he had sacrificed himself in vain. So it appeared to Wydale, while he lay eagerly turning over in his mind the possibilities of the situation. "And why," he thought, "now, while there was a pause, did not Monella cut the cords that kept them lying helplessly upon the floor?"

Then King Kara's voice was heard, ringing loudly through the hall:

"Seize him! Kill him! On to him, ye dogs! He is but one man, and has no followers. He hath

ventured here; let him take the consequences. Seize him—kill him, I say!”

But Monella stood unmoved and calm. He did not even look to right or left, but kept his gaze upon the Kralen now preparing for a rush at this new foe. What mattered Kara's frantic orders? Well Monella knew that no one in that assembly would venture through the bars and into the cage while the Kralen was unloosed.

Kara himself, almost mad with fury though he was, soon thought of this.

“’Tis well,” he said, concealing his chagrin that no one had moved to obey him. “Let him fight the Kralen—if he dares. The combat will afford us royal sport. He cannot conquer, for no man hath yet prevailed in open fight against the Kralen.”

And now ensued a terrific combat between Monella and the monster. The creature seemed to know, by some fell instinct, that it had here a formidable foe to meet, and not merely its usual helpless, unarmed prey. At once it showed a serpent-like alertness and sagacity. It poised for an instant in the air, then made a sudden rush, trying to beat its enemy to the ground.

And it all but succeeded, for Monella was borne back and fell on one knee. He seemed to be assailed on every side at once. The great claws gripped at him, the beak-like mouth snapped at him, and the wings beat against him, closed round him, and with other claws at their extremities assailed his head and body. With a great effort, he aimed a heavy blow at the creature's body that drove it back, when he leaped again to his feet. At that the Kralen

swept circling round, with piercing screams, and again swooped suddenly upon him, forcing him backward with its weight and impetus, and all but throwing him to the ground ; but this time, as it passed over him, he dealt such a blow at one of its wings that a great rent appeared, and the limb was partially disabled. Quickly perceiving this, he was not slow to follow his advantage. He darted upon the monster before it could rise again beyond his reach, and, with a tremendous blow, broke off the greater portion of the wing he had already injured. Then the hideous beast lay flapping on the ground, roaring and screaming, and twisting helplessly, and whirring its uninjured wing, and snapping its jaws like a great steel spring trap, while it vainly strove to crawl along the ground to get at its assailant.

But Monella now took little further notice of it. He had to think about the human foes surrounding him. From these had gone up a wolf-like howl of rage when they had realised that the Kralen had been worsted. They uttered loud cries of vengeance, yet durst not yet enter the cage wherein the monster was still flapping about, and might, for aught they knew, recover itself. Nor did anyone there care to be the first to face that dauntless fighter whose figure was but too well known to many who had fled before him on the field of battle.

Just then another masked figure ran down one of the staircases and pushed its way into the cage. It bent down and cut the bonds of the two prisoners, while Monella stood in front of them, defying alike the wounded Kralen and the crowd of armed men outside the cage. Sydney Dareville—for he it was—

after cutting the cords that bound the two, and whispering in their ears, proceeded to bind over their faces masks like those Monella and himself were wearing. Then he lifted Vanina in his arms and waited. Wydale had risen to his feet and stood beside them. Monella removed his mask, and, addressing those opposed to him, cried out in sonorous tones, that rang through the amphitheatre like the clang of a booming bell :

“Kara ! Malion ! All ye vile following of a cruel, bloodthirsty priesthood ! Take from my hands the punishment that an outraged God hath sent you !”

He replaced his mask, and, drawing from a pouch what appeared to be a small crystal ball, he threw it on the ground some distance from him. There were heard sounds as of broken glass and a slight explosion, and that was all.

But the effect upon the angry, threatening mob outside the cage was magical, tremendous, awful. For the crystal ball and the masks formed the gift of the Flower-Dwellers that George had brought in the ebony casket ; and when the little ball was broken, there spread around a strange and deadly gas that instantaneously seized upon every human being not protected by a mask. Its effects were altogether different from those caused by any other noxious gas or vapour known to science, in that it did not kill immediately, but produced first a paralysis of the lower limbs. Each one affected by it became then as though turned to stone below the waist, the upper part of the body remaining for some time full of life, while the deadly numbness crept slowly upwards. None moved from his place ; those who

were seated remained seated, and those who had been standing kept their position. They did not even fall to the ground ; it was as though they were glued to the spot by some terrible, irresistible power. Nor could they so much as guess at what it was that thus affected them ; the death-dealing gas was colourless, odourless ; no clouds of smoke or visible vapour spread abroad ; no suffocating fumes attacked their nostrils. The prevailing idea amongst these hapless wretches was that Monella, whom they had long learned to fear, was possessed of some fearful, diabolical power he had held in reserve, and now turned against them in requital of this their last act of intended wickedness towards his friends ; and the majority gazed at him with dilated eyeballs, as on an offended god armed with resistless power. Two or three threw spears and javelins ; but these he parried easily with his shield—but none could stir to advance against him.

Then Sydney lifted Vanina in his arms, and bore her up the staircase by which he and Monella had descended. This staircase and the galleries above were empty, all the crowd having found room below ; there was no one therefore in their way when once they were on the steps. Wydale—all were protected by their masks—slowly followed, and last of all of this silent procession of living beings amongst the dying, walked Monella.

Meanwhile, in those left below, slowly—very slowly,—the deadly feeling crept ever upwards, till the arms ceased to gesticulate, and only the hands could wave, the heads turn this way or that, and the eyes roll in their sockets. Most awesome of all, perhaps, none

cried out ; probably the subtle gas had paralysed the voice as well as the limbs. And no more awful sight could be imagined than the despairing looks that these dying ones cast at Monella, as they turned their heads to follow him till he had reached the top of the ascent. Arrived there, he gazed down on them, then bowed his head as though he would salute the dying, and whispered within his mask, "God's vengeance is accomplished !"

Then he turned and opened a door in the rock, and, closing and fastening it behind him, made his way through an underground passage till, after passing other doors which he also closed, he found himself in a great cavern, where Sydney, Wydale, Vanina, George, and others, were awaiting him, all now without their masks. Then he removed his own.

"Is the maiden well?" he asked, alluding to Vanina.

Wydale seized his hand.

"Well and safe—both of us, good friend," he exclaimed. "Ah—" turning to Vanina, "did I not say that three or four days would be enough for Monella's help to reach us?"

"Thank God—not me," said Monella, solemnly. "Our enemies are all dead! The Flower-Dwellers' Gift hath done its work!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END.

THE following morning a fleet of boats sailed out of the harbour of Dilandis fully prepared to attempt the capture of Karanda by assault, and, should that fail, to lay siege to the place.

The steam launch — now named the *Queen Vanina*—accompanied them, and in it were to be seen Monella, Rokta, Ombrian, Dareville, Wydale, and others of the chief personages of the place.

The launch had been altered back to her original shape, and the steel shears which Monella had found in the cargo of the *Saucy Fan*, and been so effective in the destruction of the Karanite fleet, had been removed from her bows, and were now in more peaceful use in the little ironworks that had been established in the town.

But when they reached Karanda, it was quickly seen that there would be no fighting. The harbour gates stood open, and there were neither soldiers nor guards of any kind. The whole place was disorganised, the townspeople stood about in groups, talking in hushed voices, too utterly stunned by the calamity that had befallen them to think of organising resistance. They had not, indeed, a leader left. Every person in authority had perished in the dread catas-

trophe that had overwhelmed all those gathered in the Temple of the Crystal Mountain—either at the time or afterwards. For, as it presently appeared, some few of the chief officers to whom the defence of the city had been confided, while the rest were occupied at the festival, had, later in the day, incited thereto by vague rumours of disaster, left their posts to make inquiry at the Temple. And of those who had thus entered, not one had since returned; and when others had gone to seek them, they also had not come back. Then a great awe and fear had fallen upon the town; no further attempts to approach the Temple had been made, and, as the night passed and the morning dawned, and still none came forth from that place of death, vague fears developed into absolute terror and dismay.

It is scarcely, therefore, to be wondered that the Dilandians were welcomed rather than repelled. The bewildered, frightened populace were like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, and they readily submitted themselves to their new rulers.

Monella entered into possession of the palace and the various offices, and at once set up a government, and the people soon returned to their peaceful occupations, well contented with their lot. The country was formally annexed to Dilanda, and incorporated as a portion of that kingdom.

Meantime, it became a question, after order had been in some degree established, what steps could be taken to remove and bury the dead lying in the Temple of Kraldeema; but about this there was a difficulty to be forthwith explained.

The ebony casket George had brought with him—

the gift of the Flower-Dwellers—and delivered into Monella's hands, had been found, on examination, to contain six curiously-constructed masks and a small hollow ball of glass or crystal. There was a scroll enclosed, which Monella managed to decipher, and which explained that the ball was filled with a deadly gas which, even in the open air, would kill everyone within a considerable distance of the spot from which it issued, *except* those protected by the masks. This was the great secret of the Flower-Dwellers; it was the explanation of their "Masked Men," and of the fact that they were able to maintain themselves against all-comers and deal out death to all approaching them.

Now it so happened that Monella had long been engaged in a secret quest. He had discovered, amongst other ancient manuscripts and archives in one of the museums, a plan of the labyrinth called the "caverns," from which he gathered that they had once extended much farther than was now supposed, and had, in fact, been connected with the "Crystal Mountain." He saw that, if he could secretly find and reopen these lost passages, all cut through the solid rock, they might one day afford a means of surprising the Karanites by an attack from an altogether unexpected quarter. With two or three assistants whom he knew he could absolutely trust, he had, therefore, long been engaged in opening up these passages, which had become blocked by falls from the roof, and in other ways. The quest had proved long and tedious; there were so many old passages and galleries which, after being emptied and explored, were found to lead in the wrong direction; and, in

consequence, the workers were beginning to despair, when they stumbled upon the right one only a few weeks before. They were then able to penetrate into the Temple, for the passage they had discovered and cleared led direct into one of the recesses attached to the upper gallery of the amphitheatre. Here it was closed by a door of wood and iron, which, however, was old and rotten and rusty, and was left uncared-for by those in charge of the Temple, because the passage just beyond it was choked with *débris*. There were, indeed, many such old doors about the place, all leading into unused passages, similarly blocked, and it never occurred to anyone that this particular one was being industriously cleared with a view to using it against them if occasion should arise.

When, therefore, Monella became possessed of the terrible engine of destruction in the crystal ball, and was apprised by the message brought by the faithful crane of the peril in which Wydale and Vanina stood, he conceived it possible to effect their rescue almost single-handed. The chief difficulty lay in getting to them, so as to place the masks upon their faces, and this he foresaw could only be done while their enemies were kept at bay by the Kralen itself. Hence it was necessary he should once more essay a fight with the "vampire," and this he had not hesitated to do.

But, on returning from the expedition, having rescued the prisoners, and destroyed their foes in the manner that has been described, Monella had given the casket—in which were now only the masks—into George's care, charging him to deliver it to Dr. Manleth, who was curious to examine them to learn

their secret. In shape and general design they were somewhat after the fashion of the one Monella had improvised on the occasion of his first fight with the "vampire"; but, almost necessarily, they comprised some further special secret, which the doctor was anxious to investigate. Unfortunately, George, while crossing in the boat, had, in his jubilation at regaining his sister and his friend—now, as could be easily seen, on the closest terms with one another—opened the casket to look at the masks, and the whole had slipped from his hands and gone overboard, and sunk quickly out of sight.

Thus the difficulty had arisen that no one could now go into the Temple to bring out the corpses.

"I was specially warned by the scroll that accompanied the 'Gift,'" Monella explained, "that, if the gas were employed in a closed place, its deadly effects would remain for years—it was stated, indeed—even for centuries. Moreover, the gas has the property of conserving the bodies of those it slays. It seems to me, therefore, that there is but one course to be taken, and that is to brick up all the entrances, and make the whole place one vast tomb. It is the only safe plan, for to leave it open would always mean danger to the living; many strangers, from curiosity, might make their way in, and so meet certain death. Even to build up and close the various openings will be a work of danger; but I think it can be effected without fatal results by strict vigilance and watchfulness on the part of those who overlook the work. The unique result will be that, owing to the preservative qualities of the gas, that hapless host will remain just as they died; and if the place were entered

hundreds of years hence, they would all appear as though they had perished but an hour or two before!"

This work was duly carried out, and thus for years and hundreds of years to come this strange assembly will remain just as they were left by Monella and his masked friends—King Kara on his throne, Morveena, that unwomanly woman, by his side, with Malion and all the evil throng that followed him;—and, in their midst, in the golden death-cage, the slaughtered "Kralen,"—their faces turned, their open eyes all staring with that despairing look, their hands and arms pointing towards the top of the staircase from which Monella had looked his last upon them.

The unhappy beings crowded into the garden in which Wydale had been a prisoner, were released unharmed. Fortunately for them, the door of the "Catacombs" had been fastened against them while they were waiting for their death, otherwise, doubtless, many of them would have entered the place from curiosity, and would have perished.

Amid the general joy and congratulations, there was one deeply disappointed man, and that was the worthy doctor. Not to be able to get at the body of the vanquished Kralen, and hold a post-mortem on the remains, and preserve the skull and other bones for scientists to examine and wonder at at the Royal Institution in London, was indeed a terrible disappointment to him.

Were there several Kralens, or only one? That is what he often wondered; and the point was never settled.

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Besides the masks and crystal ball, the casket had

enclosed something else—a prediction that the “channels” would be open at or about a certain date, then only a month ahead. And this agreed with Gralda’s own reading of what was “written in the stars,” as was the expression used in the country. So now was heard the sound of preparation for departure ; for Monella was getting ready the *Saucy Fan*, and announced to all and sundry his intention of trying to get her out to the open sea. And it was soon known that Vanina and her brothers, and Wydale and the doctor, would accompany him.

“I have had enough of playing the *rôle* of ‘Warrior-Queen,’ or any other queen,” Vanina said, with a faint smile, when pressed to stay and become, as had been promised, their ruler, or joint-ruler with Rokta and Idelia. “If there were likely to be further warfare, I might be of some good, and in any case would not desert my post, so long as I could be useful ; but, happily for you all, there is no further fear of that, and Idelia is far better suited than am I to rule over your now peaceful country. I should like to stay long enough to see you married (Rokta and Idelia), but that, it appears, is impossible in the circumstances ; so you must let us go without that happiness.”

Perhaps the one who was most loth to leave was Sydney ; he would have preferred remaining. But he could not well refuse to accompany his sister and brother. As to George, he cared only to follow Vanina and her lover, and was quite happy wherever they were.

The gentle Idelia showed in every possible way her regret at losing her friends, and her wish to

testify her regard for them. She called a meeting of all the notables and councillors, and requested them to advise her as to what fitting tribute they should offer to their departing friends, and they advised her in no niggardly spirit. Since Vanina would not remain and wear the Crown jewels, they decided that she was, at least, entitled to her share of them, and this they insisted upon her accepting. And her share was worth a king's ransom. The others also were all recompensed in like princely fashion, so that Sydney and Wydale found themselves paid a hundred times over for the cargo of the *Saucy Fan*. Nor was Peter Jennings forgotten. He had also decided to take his chance in the *Saucy Fan*, and he was able to take with him enough to keep him comfortably for the remainder of his days.

Then the day of parting came. A small fleet of boats accompanied the *Saucy Fan* when, in tow of the launch, she slowly made her way towards one of the "channels"—not that by which she had come, but another, the current in which would flow out towards the open sea. To reach this it was necessary to pass near the island of the Flower-Dwellers, and there, upon the beach, George saw a group, and through his glasses could distinguish Myrla and her parents, and others he had known during his stay amongst them. And, as the procession passed them, they waved banners (made in the forms of giant blossoms) by way of "adieu."

"It's awfully kind of them to come down to see us off," George said; "I wonder how they knew? But there! they seem to know everything! If it hadn't

been for them, we shouldn't have had you here now, you know, sis."

And Vanina gazed at the group with tears in her eyes, while she thought of all their help had done for her; and she kissed her hand to each in turn, as George pointed them out, one after the other.

Soon the island was left astern, and the *Saucy Fan* entered, in a little while, the "channel," which they found open. The current was gentle, though steady, and would offer no difficulty to the return of the launch. It had been arranged that this boat should be left as a present to the islanders (some of whom had learned to manage the machinery), and that it should tow back the other boats against the current.

In time, the open sea was safely reached, and there, in calm water, and with but a gentle breeze, the *Saucy Fan* spread out her white wings—the new ones that had been specially made to suit her altered rig. Loud were the cries of admiration from the Dilandians who saw her now for the first time in full sail; and long and hearty were the huzzas that followed the pretty vessel and those on board. And thus the *Saucy Fan* sped swiftly away, as graceful a craft as many a schooner-yacht in some of the crack yachting clubs.

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She had scarcely passed out of sight of the boats and launch, when Peter Jennings, who was look-out man for the watch, espied a dark object on the waves, which turned out to be a boat with five shipwrecked sailors in it. They had been floating about, it seemed, for

many days and nights, and were in an exhausted state. They were taken on board and kindly treated, and showed their gratitude by joining as crew, and proving themselves good sailors.

After a prosperous voyage, they arrived at Rio, where almost the first news they received on landing was that of the death of the Darevilles' step-father.

"Then, after all, his rascally plot availed him nothing," was Sydney's comment. "Well, he is dead now; so the less we say about him the better."

Vanina was married shortly afterwards to Wydale, and, with George, went to live at her old home on the pampas. They keep the *Saucy Fan* as a pleasure yacht, and are often to be met with up and down the coast from Buenos Ayres to Georgetown in British Guiana.

Sydney went for a year or two's travel in Europe, and then married and settled down near his sister; and they often discuss together their adventures in the *Saucy Fan*. And, to amuse the children—for there are now several—Vanina will sometimes dress herself as a "warrior-queen," in the dress and armour she wore when in the country, and put on her head the jewelled crown of Atlantis, which she brought away and has ever since kept intact.

George is studying chemistry, and declares he will persevere until he discovers some of those wonderful secrets of the Flower-Dwellers. Some think he will start off one day on another visit to the Island of Atlantis, and venture, once more, amongst the Flower-Dwellers; for it is said he has

never quite overcome his liking for the winsome Myrla.

Dr. Manleth amuses himself still in the laboratory; but, being a rich man, has no need to over-exert himself; and he does not. He is looked upon, in a certain circle, as a harmless, but eccentric, scientific enthusiast, who believes in the existence of strange monsters, and fancies he once had some "Gulliver's travel"-like adventures amongst an unknown people somewhere in the Caribbean Sea.

And Monella! What of him? He remained for a while with Mr. and Mrs. Wydale, and then started off on the quest that had long been in his mind, namely, the search for the lost city of Manoa, or "El Dorado." He would fain have persuaded Wydale to accompany him, but on that proposal Mrs. Wydale peremptorily "put her foot." "She had had quite enough," she declared, "of adventures amongst lost cities."

So Monella started on his mission by himself; and those who care to hear what followed, and the wonderful adventures that befell him, will find them faithfully recorded in the book "that bears the strange device" or title of "The Devil-tree of El Dorado."

THE END.

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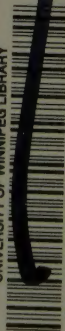
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